

Show tickets available but selling briskly

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

"The Jackie Wilson Story," the musical that set box office records when it played at the 2001 National Black Theatre Festival, is coming back to Winston-Salem tomorrow and Saturday. And the N.C. Black Repertory Company, which is making the shows possible, promised that "The Jackie Wilson Story" will bring pure joy to those who are fortunate enough to attend the performances, which will start at 8 p.m. in the Kenneth R. Williams Auditorium on the campus of Winston-Salem State University.

The Black Rep says that "The Jackie Wilson Story" is a must-see that local folks don't want to miss.

The Black Rep says no other show in the history of Winston-Salem has had the impact that "The Jackie Wilson Story" has had on this city. The show was sold out each night during the theater festival. Thousands of people were turned away.

Chester Gregory II, who stars as the legendary Jackie Wilson, has been described as simply magical. His high-energy jumps in the air are mesmerizing and have been called tornado-like. The songs that he sings are the essence of Jack-

ie Wilson.

The Lyceum Series of Winston-Salem State University is co-presenting the production, which is a creation of the Chicago Black Theatre Ensemble. The extraordinarily talented Jackie Taylor, the founder of

the company, wrote, directed and produced the show.

Tickets can be purchased at the office of the N.C. Black Rep, 610 Coliseum Drive in Winston-Salem, or by calling (336) 723-2266. All tickets are \$35.



The cast of "The Jackie Wilson Story."



Chester Gregory III

Bokonon

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tal (maternity, malaria, tuberculosis, trauma/injury and general illness sections). Disease-carrying insects have access to nearly every room while rain ends up on hospital beds, many of which lack bed linens for the patients to rest on.

Pobe Hospital stopped receiving money from the Beninese government more than 10 years ago when it no longer could provide funding to the facility. Still the few but dedicated and trained doctors remain on staff and continue to try to treat those in need, even with little to no supplies.

"Until you go there you don't realize how poor it is, and at the same time you don't realize how amazing an experience it is when you go over there and see these people who are so dedicated and hard-working like these doctors," Bechtel said. "They have so little but they're putting every last effort into making everything better."

Najmi recalls chickens hovering near a room where an X-ray machine was stationed. "Just knowing that we have an overabundance of resources and that they have such a need was overwhelming," said Najmi, who was humbled by the trip and appreciates the opportunity to witness a developing country in critical stages of transition in person.

Students spent one week lodging with a host family in Benin while attending lectures and visiting agricultural and industrial sites and schools over the course of the five-week trip. A United Nations (UN) Economic Summit was being held in the region and the students were able to attend that as well.

Bechtel stayed with a small family of four that included a young couple, their small infant and a grandmother in a small one-bedroom house with no kitchen. Some days electricity was available and meals are cooked outside over a fire.

"One of the main things you see when you go to a hospital like this is you see illnesses that are not chronic but they're acute and they can't be

treated because they don't have the right things. People don't die of heart attacks or high blood pressure; they die because they have tuberculosis and malaria, things that we here in the United States don't even think about," said Bechtel, who hopes to return to the region to do some sort of medical work.

This annual trip to West Africa serves a dual purpose of exposing the WFU students to Third World living and also as a yearly homecoming for a faculty member of the university. Sylvain Boko, Boko, assistant professor of economics at WFU, was born in the very hospital that Project Bokonon aims to serve, and he leads the summer economics class of students that travels to Benin.

"It's clear that there's a huge disparity between anything that we can think of in terms of facilities here and in a country like Benin. Benin is only a typical example of a developing country," Boko said.

Boko said he was "pleasantly surprised" when the students decided to raise money for Pobe Hospital, although Project Bokonon is not the first fund-raising attempt for the facility in Benin.

Before the students left Benin, they went back to the hospital to speak with the small staff of health-care workers about their urgent needs.

"It's overwhelming. It's good to see. It's not something that I did initiate; it was really them initiating it and it's good to see," Boko said. "I hope that it serves to inspire them somewhat. I was born there and I grew up there. There's nothing in my background that could have predicted that I could be sitting here today."

Originally Bechtel and Najmi intended to raise \$500, but since the bulk of the fund-raising got under way in February, close to \$2,000 has been donated by WFU students and staff. Both students hope to extend the fund-raiser to the rest of the local community with the hopes of being able to purchase medical supplies by the time Boko and another group of students return to West Africa in May/June of this year.

with a \$1,000 gift. In 2001, the foundation paid grants of \$18.3 million, including \$3.5 million in 138 local discretionary grants.

The foundation's ECHO Fund (ECHO stands for Everyone Can Help Out) is a \$2.5 million granting source put in place for five years beginning in the year 2000 and specifically earmarked for funding projects that build social capital, which has been defined as "people coming together to strengthen the fabric of their community."

"(Project Bokonon) can serve as a steppingstone. I think, if anything, this will just expand. Our university's motto is "pro humanitate" (for humanity), and it has pretty serious commitment to that," Najmi said.

Bechtel, Najmi and other student organizers for Project Bokonon welcome money and further ideas for the fund-raiser. They all hope that Project Bokonon can be perpetuated once a service trip is established by the university with the sole purpose of delivering money and supplies to Pobe Hospital in Benin.

To make a donation to Project Bokonon, contact Brett Bechtel at 758-6226 or Rosita Najmi at 758-1488 or e-mail projectbokonon@hotmail.com.



Wake Forest students man a donation drop-off site on the school's campus.

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