

Terry McMillan novel comes to the stage

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The Unity Theatre Ensemble of St. Louis is planning to wow audiences here with its adaptation of Terry McMillan's novel "Mama," just as it has wowed hometown crowds and critics.



McMillan

According to Ralph E. Greene, artistic director of the ensemble, "The production attempts to bring to life before the audience and in the minds of the audience some of the exciting literary values of Miss McMillan's work which have made this novel so popular among her numerous fans."

Among those values, he continued, are "her ability to create believably rich characters filled with powerful and compelling reasons to survive, to experience life with gusto, to overcome adversity within a framework that offers no apologies; her keen power of observation of people and their



Actors on stage in the play "Mama." The play is based on the Terry McMillan book.

Photo courtesy of the Unity Theatre Ensemble

motivations; and her ability to capture the rhythms of everyday speech with accuracy."

The play will be brought to life using devices from traditional theater and reader's theater.

Greene, who directs the play, said bringing books to life for the stage is an experiment that has worked well.

"I see that bringing literature from the page to the stage is a way of extending the possibilities of black theater. Miss McMillan's work makes the job easy because of her

ability to develop such interesting characters."

"Mama" is a story of survival against tremendous odds, of joblessness, hunger, and the care of five growing children by a single mother, Greene said.

"It's a story about a black mother's choices and the consequences of those choices made in order to keep her family together...about women and men... about accepting responsibility, dealing with what is and moving forward," Greene said.

Venue:
NCSA's The Proscenium Thrust

Schedule:
Aug. 5 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Aug. 6 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Aug. 7 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Price:
\$35

Production features emerging hip-hop artists



Aya De León will perform "Thieves in the Temple: The Reclaiming of Hip-Hop."

Photo courtesy of Cultural Odyssey

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

"First Contact" features young, emerging artists in hip-hop theater, spoken word and new performances.

The production will present young artists in novel ways, maximizing their exposure to festival audiences.

Aya De León will present her new piece, "Thieves in the Temple: The Reclaiming of Hip-Hop." In this one-woman hip-hop theater show, De León explores a variety of characters, including a white gangster rap fanatic from America's heartland, and a sex object emcee on the verge of a nervous breakdown. At the center, however, is her personal journey from wide-eyed teenage hip-hop fan to grown woman poet and occasional emcee.

Idris Ackamoore and Kamau "Pitch Black" Bakari will present "The OG and the B Boy." The performance is a hip-hop musical that explores intergenerational conflicts, misunderstandings, resolution, belief systems and dialogues between an OG (original gangster) and a B-Boy (young hip-hop artist).

Spoken word, tap dance, jazz and theater are utilized to tell the story.

Cultural Odyssey of San Francisco is presenting "First Contact."

Venue:
SECCA

Schedule:
Aug. 7 at 8 p.m.

Price:
\$35

Profile: Larry Leon Hamlin, NBTF producer, artistic director

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Larry Leon Hamlin is a native of Reidsville, where he attended Booker T. Washington High School. Hamlin is nationally and internationally known for his profound contributions to black theater in America.

He received two personal invitations from former President Bill Clinton to visit the White House to attend the National Medal of Arts and the Charles Frankel Prize Awards ceremonies.

Hamlin is the founder, producer and artistic director of the National Black Theatre Festival, one of the most historic and culturally significant events not only in the history of black theater but American theater in general. He is also the founder, executive and artistic director of the N.C. Black Repertory Company, the first professional black theater in North Carolina. Under Hamlin's direction, the N.C.



Hamlin

Black Repertory Company has been recognized for its superior artistic excellence as the company has toured across America and abroad.

Currently at the helm of the World Black Theatre Movement, Hamlin is engaged in a daring effort to connect black theaters globally. It is his goal that such an effort will strengthen the black theaters of the world and allow them to speak with one voice, securing global goals and objectives.

Hamlin has lectured on black theater at such prestigious institutions as Yale University School of Drama, University of Connecticut, New York University, Brown University, Winston-Salem State University, University of Louisville, N.C. A&T State University, Livingstone College, and Virginia Tech University.

Hamlin received his theater training at Brown University under the direction of the late George Houston Bass as a member of Rites and Reason Theatre Company. Hamlin received his business education at Johnson & Wales University.

Hamlin is also a professional actor, director and playwright. His acting experience includes stage, film and television. He has written four full-length plays, two infodramas and directed more than 200 productions.