

NBTF founder promises that gala will sizzle

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

Larry Leon Hamlin is promising that opening night of the 2003 National Black Theatre Festival will be an "explosive and majestic" evening.

Hamlin, the festival producer and artistic director, said all in attendance can look forward to drummers and stars on the streets of downtown Winston-Salem celebrating the festival's 14th year.

Hamlin warns locals not to confuse their city with Hollywood for all of the limousines and flashbulbs that will be going off amid the flurry of celebrities who will converge on the area for the week.

"There will be a very positive, electrical charge in the city, and it's a great deal of love, respect and dignity for one another," Hamlin said. "In addition, you will see some great theater and an opportunity to hobnob with some of the people you see on television and film...It's truly going to be a 'marv-tastic' evening."



Ossia Davis, left, and director George Faison pose at the 2001 Opening Night Gala.

The National Black Theatre Festival is a six-day event that celebrates professional black theater companies from around the country. This biennial festival also invites the estimated thousands of attendees to take part in a host of seminars, workshops, vendor markets and performances.

This year's festival is being co-chaired by Melba Moore and Malcolm-Jamal Warner.

Festivities will kick off Aug. 4 at 5:30 with an Opening Night Gala Banquet at the M.C. Benton Convention Center.

If you don't have tickets, for get about it. They have sold out (see page 46).

A celebrity procession of about 50 television, film and stage stars will precede an awards ceremony. Among those receiving festival honors will be Diahann Carroll and Philip Rose, both of whom will be awarded the Sidney Poitier Lifetime Achievement Award. Carroll is known for her pioneering roles on "Julia" and "Dynasty." Rose was one of the first white producers to hire black actors on Broadway.

"(Rose and Carroll are being honored) because of their profound contributions to black theater and the entertainment industry as a whole," Hamlin said. "What can one say about (Carroll)? She's legendary," Hamlin said.

Following the gala and awards ceremony will be the opening performance of Lillias White's "From Brooklyn to Broadway II" at the Stevens Center at 9 p.m. White, considered to be a "diva of Broadway," wrote and performs this autobiographical piece about her journey through the professional theater circuit.

"She has a long history of working on Broadway. She knows how to work an audience...I love watching her perform. She's such a veteran, and her voice is just truly amazing," Hamlin said.

A celebrity reception will follow the performance at the Adam's Mark Hotel, where attendees can rub shoulders with



"Roc" stars Charles Dutton and Carl Gordon have a laugh during the 2001 Opening Night Gala.

the likes of CCH Pounder, Richard Roundtree, Ben Vereen and others.

The Otesha Dance Ensemble will make its regular appearance as it caps off the night by bringing some African danc-

ing and drumming to the streets for any night owls who want to groove into the wee hours of the morning.

"The city of Winston-Salem will be transformed into black theater holy ground," Hamlin said.

Trin-i-tee 5:7 will help kick off Youth/Celebrity Project

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

High-energy trio Trin-i-tee 5:7 will bring its upbeat gospel sound to Union Baptist Church for the conclusion of the First Friday Summer Praise Break. The National Black Theatre Festival Youth/Celebrity Project also will kick off at First Friday and feature the dynamic African dance troupe Otesha Creative Arts Ensemble.

The platinum-selling trio - made up of Chanelle Haynes, Angel Taylor and Adrian Anderson - recently released its third CD, "The Kiss." The critically acclaimed disc features the irresistible dance track "Holla." The song carries a message of the strength and resilience that the Holy Spirit provides. Members of the group said that the track's driving beat is part of its message.

"For me, living for God is a party," Haynes said. "It's exciting because God is always surprising me with beautiful people, things and opportunities. It's a song to be danced to in celebration of Him."

Haynes said that "The Kiss" showcases the talents of all the women. "On 'The Kiss,' we each wrote, did the vocal arrangements and co-produced one song, and we all did one together," she said. "There's a personal ingredient this time that allows each of us to step out on our own a bit."

The CD's title track, "With a Kiss," passionately tells the story of Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ.

"I was immediately drawn to that song because of the lesson it has to impart," Anderson said. "Jesus knew the character of Judas, but He also knew that he had to do what he had to do. It's crucial in our lives to know the real character of all the people who surround us."

The CD also draws from classic soul music. The trio sings Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready." The song is layered with lavish harmonies and vocal interplays, then breaks into a hip-hop coda that has become Trin-i-tee 5:7's trademark.

In addition to their music, the women have expanded their

ministry to include agencies that provide clothing, food and tutoring to children.

"God has filled us with blessing...We feel an overwhelming need to pour some of that back," Haynes said. "We want to leave a legacy not only for our music and ministry, but for being three Christians who cared about people and their lives."

The National Black Theatre Festival Youth/Celebrity Project will be held Aug. 5-8 at the Adam's Mark Hotel from 10 a.m. to



Trin-i-tee 5:7

noon. There will be daily productions to entertain and educate youths. More than 6,000 youths of all ages from around the country will interact with celebrities and theater professionals. The Youth/Celebrity Project is free to participants. For more information about the Youth/Celebrity Project, see page 36.

Union Baptist Church, "A Church Determined to Live for Christ," is at 1200 N. Trade Street. Dr. Sir Walter Mack Jr. is pastor and teacher. Visit the Web site www.unionbaptistswnc.org for more information.