

# The Obituary

Forget television, movies and even plays! Anyone who has ever attended a black funeral will tell you that all other forms of entertainment pale in comparison to this unique spectacle.

Actor and playwright Akin Babatunde explores the circus-like nature of African-American funerals in "The Obituary," everything from the casket-jumpers to the fainters and shouters.

In the one-man show, Babatunde, an acclaimed Dallas-based performer, is a man obsessed with funerals, so much so that he scouts funerals each day with a newspaper just as a coach scouts the best and brightest talent. When Babatunde's character spots an obituary of interest (it matters little if he knows the deceased person), he puts on his dark suit and heads to the service where he takes note of all the goings-on.



Akin Babatunde

"The Obituary," which is being presented at the NBTf by Dallas' Black Academy of Arts

and Letters, has been a hit at every venue where it has been staged. Babatunde has been hailed as a comic genius for his ability to aptly deliver dialogue that makes audiences keel over in laughter.

Babatunde has been in show business for much of his life. He and his brother - well known actor Obba Babatunde (whose credits include films like "Philadelphia," "The Manchurian Candidate" and "Miss Evers' Boys") - were both trained at the National Black Theatre in Harlem.

Akin Babatunde's other acclaimed one-man shows include "Of Ebony Embers," which is based on the Harlem Renaissance; "Before the Second Set: A Visit With Satchmo," which is about the great Louis Armstrong; and "Zig-Zag," which features a series of Shakespearean monologues.

He has also showcased his talents on the big and small screen in movies like "Night Vision," "Caged Fear" and "The Road to Galveston."

- The Chronicle



Nate Jacobs as Aunt Rudele.

Westcoast Black Troupe Photo

## Aunt Rudele's Family Reunion

Before Tyler Perry donned a bad wig and frumpy dress to become Madea, Nate Jacobs had already perfected the role of a streetwise, trash-talking matriarch of an African-American family.

Actor Nate Jacobs' play "Aunt Rudele's Family Reunion" is familiar to local folks. Jacobs, who plays the title role in the one-(wo)man show, performed the show in Winston-Salem nearly a decade ago via the N.C. Black Repertory Co. The late Larry Leon Hamlin developed the show, which is written by Jacobs, and directed it. Local audiences loved the show so much that it was selected for the 2003 National Black Theatre Festival. It is making a return this year.

Audiences will find the character of Aunt Rudele instantly familiar. Every family has one - an over-talkative, two-faced, know-it-all loved one who others hate to see coming and love to see going.

In the hilarious show, Aunt Rudele, who prides herself on being a devout Christian, finds fault with everyone - the young and the old alike - at her family's annual reunion.

Jacobs, who is the artistic director of the Sarasota, Fla.-based Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, is an actor-singer-comedian-writer-director. His soulful singing voice has been heard on tours with Henry Porter and The Love Campaign and on BET's "Bobby Jones Gospel Explosion."

You could say that fate led Jacobs to acting. During his senior year at Florida A&M University, he went from a prop manager to one of the lead actors in the production after another performer suddenly dropped out. Ever since, he has worked tirelessly to fulfill his theatrical destiny.

His acting credits include the roles of the Rev. Ambrose in "A Lesson Before Dying" at the Florida Studio Theater; Brother Boxer in "The Amen Corner" and John in "Bubbling Brown Sugar," both with The Players Theater. As a director, he has brought his own musical adaptation of "Sleeping Beauty" to the stage, as well as his original musical, "Strollin' Down Fairytale Lane." He is presently working on developing a new one-man comedy piece he wrote called, "Emmalene."

- The Chronicle