

A Rose Among Thorns

Rosa Parks had to be smiling down on Ella Joyce on Jan. 22, 2008, as the actress received a resolution from the City Council of Birmingham, Ala., praising "A Rose Among Thorns," Joyce's one-woman show dedicated to Parks.

Of course, Birmingham was not the site of Park's legendary 1955 arrest aboard a city bus; that happened in Montgomery, Ala., but all of the state has its racial skeletons - including Parks' hometown of Tuskegee, so the resolution presented to Joyce - which she received while performing "A Rose Among Thorns" at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival - was much ado about something.

Joyce, best-known for her role as Eleanor on sitcom "Roc," penned the play after Parks died in 2005. The actress admits that the life of the matriarch of the Civil Rights Movement became an obsession for her as she did research to develop "A Rose Among Thorns."



Ella Joyce

"From the moment it was announced that Rosa Parks passed, I armed several TV sets with VHS tapes. I pushed the record button every time she was mentioned," Joyce states on her Web site, referring to her vast research for the role. "I read something about her on the Internet and world press every morning. I have collected hours and hours of live, precious information."

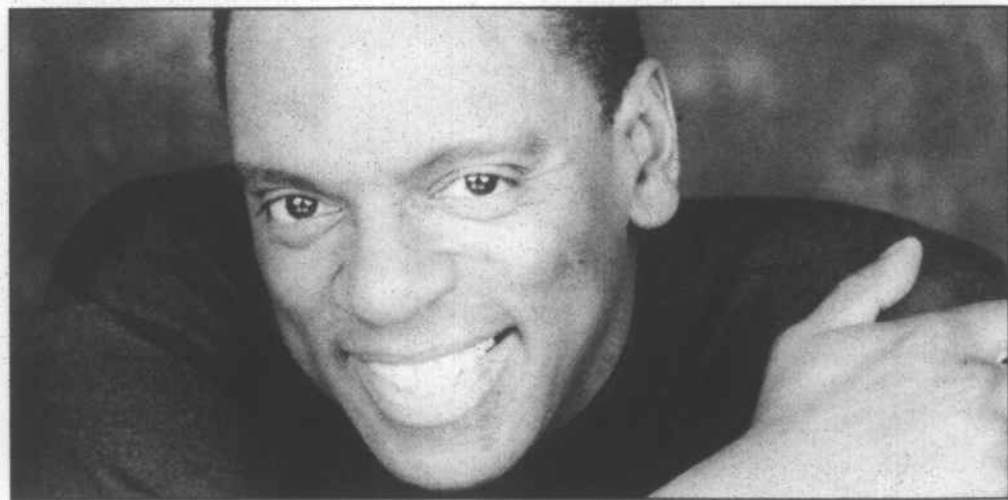
Joyce also relied heavily on Parks' autobiography, "My Story." Part of her

mission with "A Rose Among Thorns" is to encourage all American schools to require students to read Parks' book. Joyce believes that Parks' story of an ordinary, everyday woman who did extraordinary things is one that all kids need to learn.

Joyce has performed the NAACP Theatre Award-nominated play from one coast to the other in the past four years, including Winston-Salem, where she performed it to rave reviews at the 2007 National Black Theatre Festival. The NBTF and Ella Joyce have become synonymous. The 2009 NBTF will be the eighth-straight festival that she has attended.

Joyce has appeared in films such as "Set It Off" and HBO's "Stranger Inside," and guest starred on sitcoms like "Seinfeld" and "My Wife and Kids," but the stage is where Joyce first built her reputation as an actress. She was the original Risa in August Wilson's "Two Trains Running," and the original Tonya in the late playwright's "King Hedley II." Joyce's performance in Lynn Nottage's "Crumbs From the Table of Joy" earned her a JEFF Award and a prize from the Black Theatre Alliance.

"A Rose Among Thorns" is directed by Joyce's husband, actor Dan Martin, and produced by Joyce's Ms. Thing Productions.



Michael Broughton

Jim Beckwourth: The Black Mountain Man

When one thinks of legends of the Wild West, names like Annie Oakley, Wild Bill Hickock, even Geronimo come to mind. Few know that a black man, Jim Beckwourth, is right up there among that group as one of the people whose lore helped to create the rugged aura of the Wild West.

"Jim Beckwourth: The Black Mountain Man" takes audiences through

many of the adventures that made the one-time slave a legend and shines light on a hero whom time has seemingly forgotten. Beckwourth gained fame in the first quarter of the 19th century as a fur trapper and Indian fighter in Colorado and surrounding states. A book about Beckwourth's extraordinary life ("The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth") was released in 1856, but Beckwourth did not really get national acclaim until the Civil Rights Movement of the '50s and '60s - which was nearly 100 years after his death.

Beckwourth, Calif., is named for him and in 1994, he was among the "Legends of the West" featured on a U.S. Postage stamp.

Noroza Productions is bringing the one-man play to the National Black Theatre Festival. It will star actor Michael Broughton, who beat out legend Ruby Dee and others for the Best Solo Performance AUDELCO Award in 1999 for his role as Beckwourth and the more than a dozen other characters in the play.

Broughton, a stage veteran, is used to bringing real life legends to life. He won wide acclaim for playing controversial boxer Jack Johnson in a production by a Philadelphia theater company. He has also appeared on the small screen on shows like "The Sopranos," "Oz" and "Law & Order:SVU." Broughton worked alongside Robert De Niro and other notables in the 2001 film "15 Minutes."

"Jim Beckwourth: The Black Mountain Man" is written by Mark Weston. The show is directed by Leon Pinkney.



Broughton as Beckwourth

Aug. 4 at 8 p.m.
Aug. 5 at 3 & 8 p.m.
at Reynolda House

Ticket Price: \$37

INCLUDES BOTH SHOWS