

Fetch Clay, Make Man



Roscoe Orman and Eddie Ray Jackson in "Fetch Clay, Make Man."

One of this year's festival's most memorable performances will be delivered by a familiar face. Roscoe Orman is known and loved by millions for his timeless role as Gordon on "Sesame Street," but in "Fetch Clay, Make Man," he sheds all traces of the fun-loving science teacher whom he has played since 1974.

The play came from the creative mind of Will Power after he saw a photo from the 1960s of a young Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) posing ringside with Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry, the black Hollywood star known by the stage name Stepin Fetchit. The two were improbable friends. Ali was the paradigm of black cultural pride, joining the Nation of Islam and changing his name. Fetchit was despised by many in the black community for his buffoonish characters and accused of fostering negative, racist stereotypes.

The pair's odd friendship is explored in this engaging story, which takes place in 1965 as Ali is preparing for his rematch with Sonny Liston. The bond between the boxer and actor is complex, as their ideologies on many subjects are contrary. There are sub-themes in the play as well. Sonji, Ali's wife, is finding it hard to let go of her worldly ways in order to conform to the Muslim way of life. Brother Rashid has been tasked by the Nation of Islam to watch over its most famous convert and to keep him and Sonji on the straight and narrow. There are also flashbacks revealing Fetchit's rise and fall in Hollywood. He made more than 50 films between the 1920s and 1970s, becoming Hollywood's first black millionaire in the process, but he struggled financially at several times during his life.

Orman, whose Edgewater, N.J.-based RH Orman Productions is presenting the play, stars as Stepin Fetchit, displaying a range that may surprise those who know him only

from "Sesame Street." (Washington) DC Metro Theatre Arts raved, "What [Roscoe Orman] does on stage is a Master Class performance."

Orman's career began on stage when he made his acting debut while a student at the famed High School of Arts and Design in New York. A founding member of NYC's New Lafayette Theatre, Orman never left the stage. He earned an AUDELCO Award just last year for Best Lead Actor for his performance in Ed Bullins' "The Fabulous Miss Marie." His film credits include "F/X," "Striking Distance" and "New Jersey Drive." His other television credits include "The Wire," "Alpha House" and "Law and Order."

Eddie Ray Jackson plays Ali. Jackson, who earned a MFA from Columbia in 2012, has a long list of stage credits, including "Two Trains Running" (at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival), "Pen/Man/Ship" (at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco) and "X's and O's: A Football Love Story" (at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre).

The other cast members are Jefferson A. Russell, Robert Sicular and Katherine Renee Turner. Derrick Sanders directs. Sanders, the founder and artistic director of Chicago's Congo Square Theatre Company, is often mentioned alongside esteemed directors like Kenny Leon and Marion McClinton. Power, who is also a performer, has earned a trophy case full of awards for his work, including a Jury Award for Best Theatre Performance at the HBO U.S. Comedy Arts Festival and the Trailblazer Award from The National Black Theater Network. ■

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UNCSA's Gerald Freedman Theatre

Tues, Aug. 4	3 p.m.
Tues, Aug. 4	8 p.m.
Wed, Aug. 5	3 p.m.
Wed, Aug. 5	8 p.m.

\$43

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SQUARE THEATRE COMPANY



Derrick Sanders