

1B ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

DeHart building 'Fences' in Charlotte

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte actor Wane DeHart has played Troy Maxson, the principal character in August Wilson's "Fences," three times and he still isn't tired of him.

Why?

"People wondered why I would audition for this part again," DeHart said. He's done the part of Maxon in Beaumont, Texas, and Greenville, S.C. "Why do Shakespeare over? Wilson's plays are like Shakespeare to me."

Indeed. Wilson's "Fences" won a Pulitzer Prize for literature. James Earl Jones won a Tony — Broadway's highest honor — for his portrayal of Maxson.

Theatre Charlotte will present "Fences," starring DeHart and a talented ensemble cast, tonight through May 5 at its theatre at 501 Queens Road.

DeHart has other reasons for doing the play. He feels a kinship with Maxson.

"I love this thing. I was born to play this role," he said. "There are so many things in the show that parallel my life. In the play he brings home a child he had by another woman to his wife. I didn't exactly do that. I helped out my daughter when she got pregnant. There was no women around to help. That brings back memories."

"There's a lot of conflict between father and son," DeHart said. "The only reason me and my father didn't fight



The cast of "Fences" - Left to Right: Wayne DeHart, Jennifer Trott - Foote

up to his dying days was because he was too sick."

The play is set in a northern industrial city in the mid '50s. Maxson is an ex-baseball player who had the stuff to make the majors, but didn't. He's bitter, especially toward the white powers controlling the sport. They didn't give him a break, he thinks, so he takes his bitterness out on his wife Rose (Jennifer Trott-Foote) and his sons Lyons (Arthur Randolph III) and Cory (Daron Steward).

But there's much more to Troy than bitterness and there's much more to "Fences"

than the black experience.

"I would not be surprised one day in about 20 years if you see a white cast do this play. It's so universal," DeHart said. "You might have to change some of the ethnic references, but that's it. There's nobody black or white who can sit through this play and not find something from his own back yard. It's simple writing but it's almost like poetry."

"Troy is a father. He's just a father who happens to be black," DeHart said. "He started living his life through his son. He doesn't want his son to be hurt. He tells him to go

learn how to do something—learn how to build houses, fix cars — something that the white man can't take away from you. He can stop you from playing sports because they are in control, but he can't take knowledge from you."

DeHart is also happy to see someone — anyone — interested in doing quality black theatre.

"I think it's absolutely wonderful that Theatre Charlotte was interested in doing this," he said. "But it's the third time I've done the production and I've yet to do it for a black director or a black theatre

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Tumbling
Diane McKinney-Whetstone
William Morrow and Company
\$24

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Opening Diane McKinney-Whetstone's first novel "Tumbling," propels the reader headfirst into South Philadelphia of the late '30s and into the lives of redcap Herbie and his devout wife Noon.

Childless and unable to have marital intimacy because of Noon's childhood trauma, the young transplanted couple are both searching for identity: Noon through religion, Herbie through a revert to his bachelor's lifestyle of late nights in clubs, searching satisfaction.

The novels opens with Herbie finding a compelling infant on their porch steps after a night of partying at the Royale. A kind man, Herbie is immediately smitten with the child, Fannie, as is Noon. Both agree that the child is a gift and with the aid of the local minister, legally make Fannie a part of their home. They are blessed again five years later, when a second child, Liz, is left by her blues-singing aunt to be raised in the capable loving hands of Noon.

"Tumbling" takes numerous twists and turns as the family individually and collectively adjusts to one another, the changes wrought by the outbreak of World War II, and the state of racial affairs in post war Philly.

McKinney-Whetstone is a master at presenting images that entice the reader and make the novel difficult to put down. The reader tumbles into the world of Herbie and Noon and is anxious to see that they find true happiness.

Interwoven into the lives of Herbie and Noon are the mysteries surrounding their children, and the destruction of their neighborhood for a new road. Noon finds herself leading the group committed to preventing the road of passing through their community. Her increased visibility leads Noon to recognize her own worth and aids in overcoming many of her problems.

McKinney-Whetstone also presents a not-so-flattering image

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SOUNDS

By Winfred B. Cross

**VIP Music and Arts
Seminar Mass Choir
Stand!**
John Prince Kee,
Producer
Verity Records

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

I haven't heard a choir album produced by John Kee that I didn't like. Stand is no exception.

Kee wrote all but one song on the CD, but you feel his stamp on the song. He's playing keyboards.

There isn't a weak song on this CD. "Stand" is the most moving, bouncing along on a rhythm with a Caribbean flavor.

"Sho' Nuff" is the most powerful. Gospel diva Vanessa Bell Armstrong lends her mighty

**Chicago Mass Choir
Hold On, Don't Give
Up**
Percy Gray Jr.,
producer
CGI Records

☆☆☆☆

The Chicago Mass Choir will always be remembered for "I'll Go To The Rock," a song that will bring a congregation to its feet no matter who's singing.

On its new recording, the choir not only matches that high-energy performance, it tops it. Chicago Mass' latest is filled with good stuff: singing, arranging and performing.

The CD opens with "New Name," a whoop-it-up praise song. The next is the title cut, a majestic slow song that finds choir and soloist in fine voice.

"Great Day" has the feel of "I'll Go To the Rock." The broad-voiced alto works the song for all its worth, with the choir delivering foot-stomps, hand claps and soaring backing vocals. If you sit through this song, you'll need a pulse check.

"Lift The Savior Up" is the near twin of "I'll Go To the Rock." You may need to pull out your shouting shoes. And while you've got them out, listen to "God Will Fix It." If you still have those shoes on, you may just have to kick 'em off.

**O'landa Draper
and the Associates
Gotta Feelin'**
Laythan Armor,
producer
Warner Alliance

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

Turn on a gospel radio station, listen for two minutes and you'll hear a live recording of a choir being played. Studio albums aren't in a choir's repertoire.

That's good, because a lot of things that happen in front of an audience don't happen in the studio.

Just ask O'landa Draper and his Associates. His Gotta Feelin' just wouldn't be the same in the confines of a studio. There wouldn't be much spark.

There's plenty on this disc. Draper guides his Associates through some fine songs with plenty of enthusiasm and a little bit of pop radio flavor. If the breakdown on the title song sounds familiar, it should. It comes straight from Brandy's "Baby, Baby" remix. That's OK. Draper and contemporaries Donald Lawrence, John Prince Kee and Kirk Franklin borrow liberally from pop stuff. None sacrifice the message or integrity of gospel music, however.

Don't worry, there's more traditional than contemporary on this recording. "His Blood



CHICAGO MASS CHOIR

Washes Me" will rock any church to its foundations. And "Gonna Sing Your Music" will satisfy both young and old.

Rating:

☆☆☆☆ Classic;

☆☆☆☆ Excellent;

☆☆ Good;

☆☆ Fair;

☆ Why?



STAND!



O'LANDA DRAPER

