

VIEWPOINT

'Down Home' a performance worthy of praise

By BEVERLY SHEPARD
Special Projects Editor

"It was not designed as a slick Broadway show," said Dr. Lee Green about "Down Home," a production of English 84, Black American Literature.

The show was billed as a presentation of "Black history through the arts." The 65 performers in "Down Home" participated with the intent to learn and enjoy, Green said.

Apparently, one Daily Tar Heel reviewer, Bob Royalty, failed to recognize or consider either of these two factors in critiquing the success or failure of an entire production.

Productions began two weeks into the semester with Black students displaying commendable talents in dance, song, and drama. These amateur talents can not be measured

by a professional rating as the DTH reviewer intends them. Over one half of the participants had never before appeared on stage. "Nobody is turned down," Green said, "it's more important to us that people participate. Almost everybody gets to do what they want to do."

In response to Royalty's evaluation that the "dramatic continuity of the play was dubious at best," there seems to be some ignorance of Black history and inability to read and follow a printed program. "Down Home" was divided into four consecutive parts: "The Motherland," "The Alien Land," "The Land of Strange Fruit," and "The Land of Promises." These parts effectively traced Black history from its beginning in Africa, to a Southern tradition of hatred, discrimination, and intimidation. The last section showed

Blacks over the centuries having substituted Black heritage and pride with a false vision of the North as the "promised land" for advancement. Anybody aware of the rejuvenation of Black awareness, especially as it appeared in the sixties, could see how the four parts contributing to the theme of "self affirmation."

This realization on the part of the cast is more than enough to justify the finale, "Everybody Rejoice," from the "Wiz." Again, Royalty misses an obvious connotation in saying it was well-sung, "but not connection with what had been going on."

All the music selections were well chosen, needless for Royalty to say. Extremely strong solo contributions were made by Audrey Love, Kathy Artis, Brian Delany, and Karen Cuthrell among others.

Herb Farrish and the Opeyo dancers opened up the presentation with creative dancing that could possibly be criticized for being a bit too long. The Opeyo Dancers, of which the Black Student Movement takes much pride, successfully recreated the slow, comfortable familiarity of being at home in the motherland.

Dramatic excellence was also a point of strength in "Down Home." John Slade did an excellent portrayal of Jim Turner. Orlando Dobbins, as Rev. Right, six pallbearers, and a sanctified congregation brought the "Eulogy for Jim Crow" alive with audience participation.

The assumption that the slaves dressed in white sheets were "ghosts or Klansmen" is a likely mistake that anyone with little knowledge about the Great Migration might make. But to include such a blatant criticism in a review that is an obvious lack of knowledge on a subject is inexcusable. Green said that these characters were a symbolic representation where a "domination of white means a death of Blackness." The

ghost ship was an important symbol in the migration to the new world. Thus, the figures, as both ghosts and the Ku Klux Klan, represented both physical and spiritual death to the Black slave.

Another gross mistake that reveals a shanty attempt to adequately critique a Black performance is the statement that the play was "written by Professor Lee Green." In fact, the presentation had several writers who had been previous English 84 students; Dr. Green had just been one of those writers. "All productions we do are written for people who desire the part," Green said. "We organized production so they could fit in. We added a couple of songs and monologues and revised some dramatic skits."

These types of changes clearly show that Green maintained his intent to allow the participants an expression of Blackness that they would enjoy and cherish. Down Home was more than some imitation of a pre-written Broadway show; it was a creation.

In addition, criticisms for the technicalities were also unwarranted, considering that Carolina technicians, not the cast, were in charge. Basing judgement of "Down Home" according to its intent, which as you recall was not professionalism, it was a display of motivation, enthusiasm, and awareness on the part of its participants. Subsequent animosities on the part of the performers is understandable. A letter by Dr. Green in the DTH in response to a clearly inadequately and improperly evaluated article is still not enough retaliation. Blacks should bombard the university with more productions like this one, presenting other unknowledgable reporters with the challenge of recognizing the continuing struggles of one race for understanding and expression.

Letter

Student input and concern greatly needed at UNC

Dear Editor:

Even before my arrival at UNC as a freshman in 1979, I had heard of the BSM's ability to vote in Black Homecoming Queens. By electing Nina Ford as this year's queen, the BSM has established a streak of four consecutive Black Homecoming Queens.

Quite a feat at a university where the Black student population is only five percent. One may even marvel at this accomplishment. However, one should feel angered and cheated since this ability to speak through the vote has not spread to other, more important elective positions throughout the university campus.

I have nothing personal against Homecoming Queens (This was my first time ever seeing that title presented solely to a young, beautiful Black woman), and it's not that the honor is totally unimportant — simply that there exists far more outspoken and influential positions through which to represent my Blackness.

Yes, I admire looking at Nina, but that admiration should transcend the aesthetic point of view and enter into a realm of awareness where we, as Blacks can be confronted with the issues and be truly represented.

Would it not also be beautiful to admire Nina, or any other Black, in a CGC office and seeing that everyone is getting a fair portion of the \$250,000 in the Council's budget? Perhaps serving as the dorm Governor where everyone is touched a little more personally, striving to see all cultural interests prevail and that everyone is comfortable in his surroundings.

Yet, we seem to take these responsibilities lightly — as reflected by the percentage going to the polls to individually speak out. A modest 58 of the nearly 1000 Morrison voters turned out to the polls during the recent campus wide elections; but in contrast, to win a CGC office with only two votes begins to be a little ridiculous.

We as Blacks must be even more perceptive although we are adequately represented by the BSM. This organization, however, is limited to issues within its own structure. The BSM is able to influence major university policy making only by airing grievances verbally and hoping someone listens. This is not enough and we as Blacks, but most importantly students searching to enrich our lives, should not allow this facet of our discontent with student government procedure and misrepresentation to continue.

To my fellow black students, allow me to suggest that we seek to do the following:

1. Become aware of issues confronting ourselves; not just with thinking but acting.
2. Unite under the BSM for stronger organization.
3. Enthusiastically and with some discretion for qualifications.
4. Listen to the opinions of respected individuals nationwide for guidance.
5. Use common sense.

It is hopeful that you realize the potential of our growing effort and make that materialize.

Quentin Eaton
209 Morrison

BLACK INK

"The essence of freedom is understanding."

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