

Lavonne McClain:

Student director makes her 'dream' of play a reality

by Troy Lewter

Ask LaVonne McClain what it takes to be a good director and she'll tell you "every now and then, you have to be a bitch."

In other words, adds McClain, who is directing *The Glass Menagerie* for ECSU's Little Theater, "you have to take charge and be assertive."

Being a woman director, however, makes the task somewhat more challenging.

"They (actors) tend to think that I wouldn't be as strict as Shawn Smith might be," said McClain. "They think that I can be run-over. But I'm not going to have it."

But according to McClain, her project isn't an authoritarian monarchy. She strives to provide a "balance" to her directing.

"I try to be nice but firm," she said. "You don't want actors to hate you. You have to put in as much as they put in or even more. Even with the technical crew, I wouldn't ask anyone to do something I wouldn't do. And also be understanding. Conflicts do arise."

A director is responsible for much more than just making sure actors know their lines, said McClain.

"A director envisions a play," she explained. "He or she takes a dream and makes it a reality. You have to position everything just right, such as blocking the actors' movements, working on set design, making sure costumes, lights, sound and make-up are as they should be. Basically, a director is a leader, but still part of a team."

The Glass Menagerie, is a story about the trials and tribulations of one particular family. The mother pushes the family to be successful so much that she drives them away. It also a story of a shy, crippled woman's inability to relate to the real world.

"What really attracted me to this particular play was that it had a really dynamic female role," said McClain, "whereas the last few (theater) productions were male dominated. Not since *Raisin in the Sun* has there been a really strong female role."

McClain believes the audience will relate to the play on many different levels.

"This play exemplifies real life in that everything doesn't turn out happily, (as in a) thirty-minute TV sit-com," she

said. "The theme of the play deals with survival."

McClain believes that the play's vivid characters should have wide appeal to an audience.

"There are characters that will connect with different types of people—everything from introverts to extroverts as well as domineering and submissive types."

"This is McClain's second turn at directing a major production for the theater. She also directed the comedy *Dearly Departed* during her Spring 1995 semester. Although *Departed* was her directing debut at ECSU, McClain is no stranger to the theater.

"I have been involved in theater since high school. I directed a one-act six-person show called *Caged Bird*," she said. "I also co-authored an award-winning play named *Endangered Species* that dealt with the black experience from slavery to the present day."

Her desire for "a change of pace" was another reason for McClain's decision to direct this play.

"I wanted to try drama, since I had already directed a comedy," she said.

Although McClain's current cast consists of only four people, she finds directing this production to be more of a challenge than the 15-member cast of *Dearly Departed*.

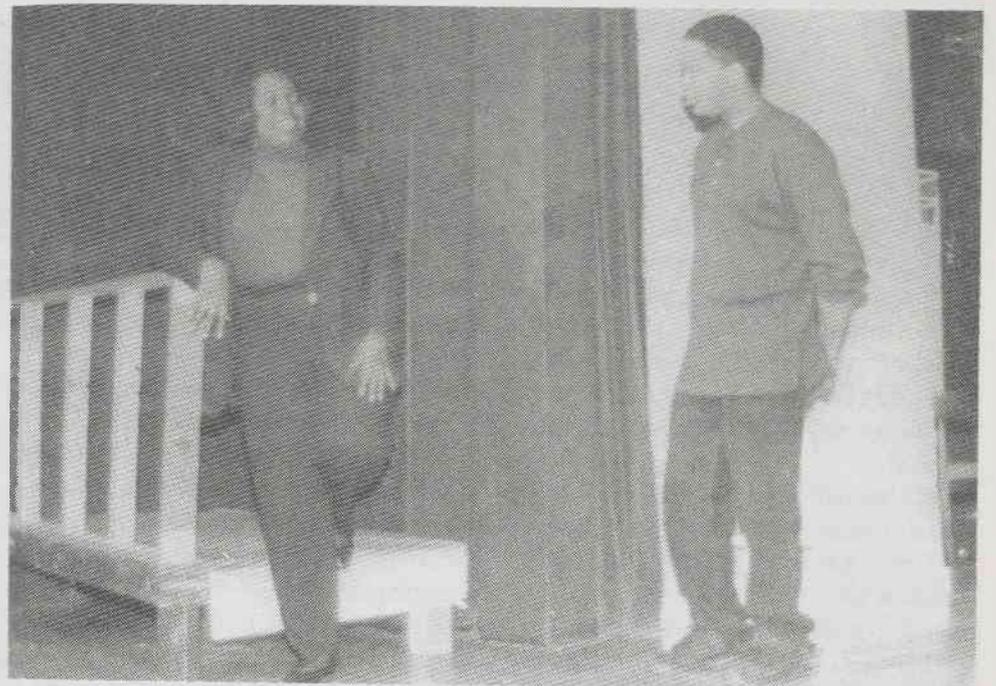
"*Dearly Departed* was easier (to direct) because there were so many people involved in that production that I really didn't know or get to know everyone on a personal level," said McClain. "*The Glass Menagerie*, on the other hand, is much more difficult because I know everyone on a personal level, so I tend to be more lenient. It is difficult to direct friends."

Khalid K. Baum portrays Tom in the play, Dorothy Wills appears as Amanda, Kendra Parker is Laura and Sam Norman plays Jim.

The Glass Menagerie opens Thursday, Dec. 4 at 8:00 p.m. in the G.R. Little Theater. There will be a second performance Friday, Dec. 5.

McClain, a native of Asheville, NC, is a business major with a concentration in management. She hopes to continue with her interest in the theater.

"Hopefully, my career in business will lead me to possibly owning my own theater," she said.



Frank G. Scott photo

LaVonne McClain, director of *The Glass Menagerie*, coaches Joel Parker on the set.

Family's bonds tested by infidelity, job loss, struggle for dreams

FILM REVIEW

by Tiffany Newell and Troy L. Lewter

If you want to see a movie without gun-toting gangsters and blood, guts and gore, go see *Soul Food*. *Soul Food* is the family movie of the season.

Tracey and Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds were right on target when they chose to use *Soul Food* as their motion picture debut for their new production company, Edmonds Entertainment.

"Edmonds Entertainment wants to make positive films that everyone can relate to," said Babyface Edmonds. "We thought *Soul Food* had this potential."

Soul Food is based on writer/director, George Tillman, Jr.'s experiences as a child growing up in a large Midwestern family. The film is centered around the Joseph family's forty-year tradition of a large Sunday meal with family conversation. Mama Joe, the glue of this contemporary African-American family, helps to keep the peace. But once Mama Joe goes to the hospital, the family falls apart.

The family's closeness is tested through trials and tribulations such as unemployment, infidelity, and the struggle to achieve dreams. Miles, for instance, wants to quit his job as a lawyer and pursue his music career. Lem is fired from his job after his boss finds out he is an ex-convict.

It is left up to Ahmad (played by Brandon Hammond), Mama's Joe's favorite grandson, to keep the family together. Ahmad takes to heart what Mama Joe has said, "You do what you have to—to stay strong, to save the family."

The "glue" that holds the movie together is the diverse range of talented actors and actresses whose honest and emotional portrayals captivate the audience's attention from beginning to end. Vanessa Williams gives her best performance to date as the character Teri. Williams was both moving and believable as the anguished wife dealing with her husband Miles' adultery with cousin Faith.

Newcomer Brandon Hammond seems to be a talent to watch in the future due to his superb acting skills. Hammond's handling of the emotional roller coaster ride that his character endures proves this to be true. In the beginning of the film, when everything is going well, he is really happy, but the loss of his grandmother followed by several other family crisis throws him into an emotional whirlwind.

Irma P. Hall, affectionately known as "Mama", gives the film a refreshing "down home roots" appeal. She cooks, dispenses folksy advice and serves as the anchor that keeps the family stable.

The rest of the cast also does a sensational job with their roles. They include: Vivica A. Fox as Maxine, who is known for her roles in *Set it Off* and *Independence Day*, Michael Beach, of *Waiting To Exhale* fame, portrays Miles and Jeffery D. Sams plays Kenny.

All in all, *Soul Food* is a refreshing change of pace from the usual gun toting, drug-selling, womanizing depictions of the Black community that dominates the African-American film market today. It shows the Black American for what they predominately are—regular people with universal human problems.