

Angel: a heartfelt interpretation

The University Players, Elizabeth City State University's drama troupe, will present the Pulitzer Prize winning play *Look Homeward, Angel* as the opening production of its current theater season.

Based on the acclaimed novel by North Carolina author Thomas Wolfe, the comedy drama will be presented in the University's Little Theater on Nov. 4, 5 and 6 at 8:00 p.m., with a 4:00 matinee on Sunday, Nov. 8.

Widely considered to be an authentic American classic, *Look Homeward Angel* centers around a 17-year-old, Eugene Grant and his family as they struggle through love, joy and sorrow in 1916 Asheville, which Wolfe called Altamont in his autobiographical novel.

Eugene is the prototype of a young man desperately searching for his identity and longing for independence. Richard Watts, New York Post drama critic, hailed *Look Homeward, Angel* as being "one of the finest plays in American dramatic literature."

Shawn Smith, director of the production, has assembled a talented cast of community, student, and faculty actors to fill the play's twenty roles.

James Michael Welton, an ECSU sophomore from Elizabeth City will appear as Eugene. A Pennsylvania native and Currituck County High School graduate, Welton is making his first appearance with the Players. Eugene's



photo courtesy of Department of Dramatic Arts

The Grant family from the University Players production of *Look Homeward, Angel*. (Seated left to right) Lamar Frasier, Marsha Lynn Williams; (standing left to right) LaVonne McClain, Shaunell McMillan, James Welton, and Stacy Brock.

strong-willed mother, Eliza, is being performed by stage veteran Marsha Lynn Williams, last seen with the Players as Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Lamar Frasier will play W. O. Gant, Eugene's stone-cutter father, and Stacy Brock will appear as Eugene's love interest, Laura James. The rest of the Gant family will include Zack Hawkins as Ben, Shaunell McMillan as Luke, LaVonne L. McClain as Helen, and Joel Parker as son-in-law Hugh Barton.

Other prominent roles will be performed by Celina Gray, C. Jeff Meads, Christopher Breakfield, Rose B. Griffen, Lasindra Webb, Amanda Chastine, Dru Scerbo, Kimberly M. Carter, Davis Thompson, Jerome Brothers, and Christine Crosland.

Sets and lighting are being designed by Randy J. Bery, while costumes are

being designed by Susan Mahaffey.

Admission for the production is \$5 for the general public, \$1.50 for ECSU faculty/staff, and \$1 for ECSU students.

Tickets will be available at the door. For reservations and information, phone the University Players' office at 335-3436.

Visionary songstress offers music with a message

By Ronel Brewer

This era of the copycat, synthesized and track-looped R&B artist, a visionary stands out. Nicole Renee has got it all, and her music is as sweet as the title of her first hit single, "Strawberry", which is part of her debut CD release.

"Live musicianship is a dying art, but she's got it. And she has a lot of Philly Soul in her. She's a mix of rock, soul, and R&B," says Craig Kallman, Atlantic executive Vice President.

She is all that and then some. You'll hear it in the soulful ballad "Heaven" that's set against a background of soft strings and guitar. The piano and accompaniment set the mood for this sensual ballad. But of all the sounds blended together, it's her voice that will strike you most. She's a veritable female Brian McKnight. The live band she uses in all her songs gives a refreshing sense of musicianship and demonstrates her years of classical study.

Renee covers the concept of love from all angles, and this self-titled LP is a collage of rock, blues and soul.

"She's got so much soul. And all the material she had written herself. We thought we were sitting across from the next Prince," said Kallman.

Renee's stardom didn't occur by lucky chance. She was an original member from the cast of BET's Teen Summit. She not only sings, she also writes,

produces, and plays her own music and she wrote 200 songs by the time she was ready to record her debut album for Atlantic Records.

She's not the ordinary "I can carry-a-tune" girl from church. She has Talent. Her range is unbelievable. Her vocal talent is displayed in every sense of the word. Her diversity is comparable to that of the greatest of the great artists.

Renee merges the realm of spirituality with that of sexuality. She runs from operatic siren calls to suggestive moans almost as effortlessly as breathing. In the song "Cocaine Lane" she makes the comparison of a drug addict's relationship to cocaine with that of the one she maintains with God. She poses the question to the addict: "What is it about this drug that would cause you to steal from your mother and lie and hurt the people you love?"

And the addict responds, "It's something that's always there, something that loves you unconditionally."

That's the way she says she feels about God, and this insight alone provides us with enough recorded musical and spiritual fact to convince the listener to see that she is not all music. She is deeper than the pretty face you see on the cover.

Nicole Renee is the real deal, and you can bet the house that you'll be hearing a lot more from her.



photo courtesy of Atlantic Records

Nicole Renee