

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Photo courtesy of Tom Taylor

Julie Polk and Mathew Detmer perform a scene from the play.

Voodoo - No Sophomore Jinx

By Mike Fournier
Arts Editor

Nelson George's book, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, was published in 1988. In the introduction, George recalls a conversation with a black record executive at a major label. The executive made the remark about how R&B music being produced at the time lacked "that intangible something" that makes music good. He would have to wait seven more years for things to change.

In 1995, with the release of his solo debut *Brown Sugar*, D'Angelo showed the world that he possessed "that intangible something." Five years later he has returned with his eagerly anticipated sophomore effort *Voodoo*, and with this release, he has raised the stakes in the world of Rhythm and Blues.

Voodoo is not a compilation of songs on tape, it is an experience. This album is what Rhythm and Blues can sound like. In a genre that has been overtaken by marketing, promotions, and formulaic lyrics and melodies, D'Angelo shines bright as an artist - not just another singer. In fact, he wrote, produced and arranged most of the album himself. He also played most of the instruments on the album. *Voodoo* is the album D'Angelo was meant to create.

The album begins with a type of ritualistic chant, almost an incantation - hence the title *Voodoo*. Lyrically, much of the album doesn't deal with the average contemporary R&B topics. D'Angelo touches on subjects like spirituality, sexuality, personal growth, and fatherhood.

"The Line" deals with the foolish

pride of today's male youth and how some are willing to put their life on the line to preserve it. "Devil's Pie," a track blessed by DJ Premier and originally released on the "Belly Soundtrack," is the most socially poignant on the album. The song is D'Angelo's pre-apocalyptic vision of man's self-inflicted demise.

Of course there are love songs on the album, but they are far from the collection of standard R&B ballads. Prince's influence can be heard on the already classic "How Does It Feel?" "Send It On" sounds like it could have been recorded in the 70's it is so soulful. And on "One Mo' Gin" D'Angelo transforms the cliché "second-chance love song" into a truly heartfelt sentiment.

Though it is a solid piece of work, there are a couple of potential drawbacks to the album. The inclusion of Method Man and Redman on "Left and Right" is a too-obvious attempt to get radio play and to lure a younger audience unacquainted with good music to the album. Also, if you don't like the way one song sounds, you may not like the rest of the album. D'Angelo's music has a distinct sound, and albeit great by most standards, at length, it may become tiring to some listeners. His vocal delivery is just as unique as his rhythms; sometimes his lyrics are uninterpretable and it may be frustrating to some listeners to try and decipher his words.

But, if you can appreciate pure R&B and understand "that intangible something" that spirits like D'Angelo possess, then you should add this album to your collection. Those that aren't ready should still check out *Voodoo*--it may just put a spell on you.

The National Shakespeare Company perform "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

The National Shakespeare Company (NSC) is America's oldest professional touring company, bringing classical theatre and arts education to communities across the United States recently appeared on the campus of Elizabeth City State University as a part of the Spring Lyceum Series. National tours of Shakespearean plays travel thirty-five thousand miles to give one-hundred performances in thirty-seven states annually, while NSC's educational program, Shakespeare to the Quick, promotes literacy and language skills at seventy-five middle and high schools in the greater New York City Area.

NSC was founded in 1963 by actress Elaine Sulka and producer/director Philip Meister. Their vision was to create a touring troupe of classically trained actors similar to those

of the early 19th century. The company's mission remains the same today - to make classical theatre and arts education accessible to audiences across the country.

Today, NSC brings performances and workshops to college and university communities in thirty-seven states. Each venue enjoys a full-length performance of a Shakespearean classic as well as educational workshops conducted by members of the NSC acting company. At the same time, NSC's local outreach program serves young people throughout the metropolitan area with in-school residencies and mini-performances of Shakespeare plays. With thirty-six years of history and experience, the company remains one of America's most renowned theatrical organizations.

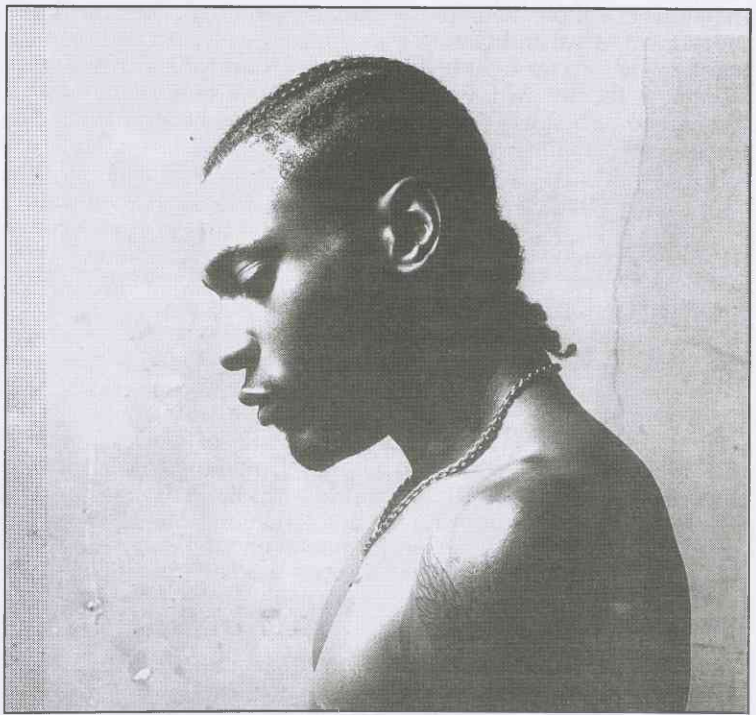


Photo courtesy of Virgin Records

D'Angelo