

Pinson, Gutwein mix poetry, music in entrancing evening

By CECILIA LYNN CASEY

The Visiting Writer Series of North Carolina Wesleyan College continues along for the 1993/1994 academic year with something new, Hermine Pinson and Dan Gutwein.

The combination of Pinson reading from her poems while Dan Gutwein accompanied her with music from a saxophone, a clarinet, and a synthesizer gave this reading both a strong performance element to keep the reading from getting dull, as well as having a few powerful poems to contemplate.

Pinson read several poems from her clap-book *Ashe* which means "the power to make things happen, or, let it be." She started by reading the prelude to *Ashe*, followed by "La Lina Nigra," then "Centrifugal Force, or, What Can You Do With a Fan?" and next "Left-handed Poem." Then she read a poem she had written for Gutwein called "Miles Davis and Friends" which had a rhythm like jazz and also "bended notes like God."

Changing the pace of the reading Gutwein started the next poem "Windspeak" by playing a saxophone, and after playing a few bars Pinson and Gutwein switched so that she sang while he read, "The wind tickled the curtain with its chilled kisses to taunt a grown woman at 10 p.m. when she is rolling her hair or planning to worry about tomorrow."

As he said the next lines, "Thinking about dreaming she cocks her ears to the north leans forward to hear what the wind is saying," Gutwein made a swooshing sound to accent the line before he continued with the next lines, "wishing upon the wind making trees sing, making soda cans in the street mimic Bessie's sugar bowl blues."

Switching again, Gutwein played the saxophone while Hermine sang and did a fair job of singing. Gutwein stopped playing and Pinson read "First, pssst!, and then it moans and buzzes the wood of the windowsill, It's just the wind baby." The next few lines Pinson would read a line and then Gutwein would answer the line with a few notes from the saxophone.

"Pssst! What is it? (music)

Review

News of war (music) news of my boy comin home (music) news of my daughter who ran off with that no-count nigger (music play through the next two lines) from St. Charles news of my old friend (silence for the next line) any babies bein born (music) anybody fallin in love (music) news of a peace that will last?"

Pinson started to sing again and Gutwein finished the poem. "What does the wind say to a grown woman after traveling so far for so long? What does the wind say? Wishhhhhh shhhh wishhhhhh."

The switching back and forth made the poem delightful and witty because the words truly became alive. Also the danger of having one performer upstage the other didn't happen, and what the audience heard and saw was a wonderful mix of music and thought.

The next poem was "Texas Poem" a poem inspired by Pinson's five-year-old daughter after she told her mother "Mama, sun bite me." The result was a flowing look at the land and sky of Texas: "Mama, don't let the sun bite me/Sun bit me"/she cries and shields her eyes/ with innocent arms/ and the sun/ the sun stares/ with the third eye of a madman/ and the land lies low to the ground/ Errant squirrels, dogs, and cats who/ mis-/ calculated stiffen and bloat/ on the highway/ mid-afternoon/

"Mama, clouds hide'/ clouds disperse/ thieves thinned out to cigarette smoke bereft of will/ caught in grim heat/ of their conspiracy/ they vanish/ in dust/ and chickweed/ the sun though/ the sun has not moved."

Suddenly Pinson said, in order to wake everyone up (which there was simply no need because the audience was very much awake and enjoying the reading), the audience had to snap their fingers in time to "Sugar's Blues." This poem was made for the lower East Side Coffee-house, finger-snapping, beret-wearing, groovy-dudes, too cool man.

Following was "Booker T. and Me" which Gutwein again got up

again to accompany Pinson with music, this time by clarinet. Then Pinson read a poem about writing, she said "my Daddy's poem," which had the wonderful line, "midwife Earth's infinite birthing, sunlight on blue lined paper."

Finally Pinson and Gutwein did "Marvin Gaye's Lament," with Pinson singing the first part of the poem and speaking the rest while Gutwein manipulated the synthesizer. As the poem moved through the streets of New York City it painted a place on par to hell, and throughout the poem Pinson repeated, "And I can't get a witness. Can I get a witness? I can't find no witness nowhere!" which accurately conveyed the coldness and uncaring which abounds in New York.

Then towards the end of the poem she read the chilling lines, "I came upon a sown-filled scene/ there was a beast tethered to a dying tree/ Something it looked like a horse,/ or a women, or something else./ it was covered with snow and/ chained to a dying tree/ while it roared and kicked/ and bucked,/ to be damned./ Behind it loomed, row upon row, the oldest tenements you ever saw/ all covered with snow," and invoked the trapped hostile nature of the city.

Ending the poem with the lines, "It is the people's 'dusk and dawn' and I can't get a witness —/ nowhere, nohow./ I can't" and sings the rest "and I go to the place to the place/ where good feelings await me./ self-destruction in my hand./ so stupid minded./ but I go crazy/ when I can't find it," moved this poem from just a sad commentary about today's society to a message that there is comfort and hope to be had, if only in words and music.

Although this reading was better than most, it still lacked the magic that Allan Gurganus produced by reading in the dark, or the strength of literary appeal that Kaye Gibbons had when she turns Nash County into literature. However, it will have to be one hell of a performance of literature and music to come close to removing Pinson/Gutwein from being a standard by which other readings are measured. Hopefully there will be other visits from Gutwein and Pinson.



POET HERMINE PINSON READS FROM HER WORKS.

THE FIRM

Starring
Tom Cruise, Gene Hackman &
Holly Hunter

March 19

9:30pm

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Starring
Clint Eastwood & Rene Russo

March 26

9:30pm

GROUND HOG DAY

Starring
Bill Murray & Andie MacDowell

March 26

9:30pm

March and April
SATURDAY NIGHT
CINEMA

Each Saturday Night In Doc's