

# New York Showfronts

By DON DE LEONARD

NEW YORK — When Jose Ferrer, who plays Iago to Paul Robeson's Othello, finishes picking the cast for Lillian Smith's "Strange Fruit" which he hopes to present on Broadway, it is quite likely that William Stevens Bryant will have drawn the assignment to portray the defiant Ed, brother of the frustrated Nonnie.

And Willie should turn in a good job for throughout the 22 years he has been in show business, the handsome 36-year-old actor and comic has done about everything there is to be done on the stage, except to sing. He should be able to breathe life into Ed.

It might be a good omen for "Strange Fruit" because in all his career, Willie has appeared in only two shows that were not hits. They were "Dat Gits It," his first play, and "Blue Holiday," the recent production that lasted less than a week on Broadway.

Willie's initiation into the field of entertainment was in an unusual way. He was born in New Orleans and had been taken to Chicago at an early age. At ten he was working as a candy boy at the old Grand Terrace, 31st and State Streets in Chicago, and between times he would imitate the actors and actresses. He became an expert mimic and used to boast that he could play the part of any actor or actress in any cast.

The Grand, at the time, was presenting stock shows, and at intervals the barber would make his spiel and the boys would flock down the aisles to get the wares. One night the grand pitchman taken ill and the manager of the Theatre began looking around for someone to do the barking. He turned to Willie and said: "You have been mimicking everybody now get up here and tell the folks about our candy."

Willie said he realized that he had to "pitch" or he would be out of a job, so he got up there and "pitched" and he has been doing it successfully ever since. At the Grand, Willie met the old-time groats of whom he declares: "The Whitman Sisters, with whom Willie launched his career, have contributed most to the Negro in show business."

Alice Whitman was the great woman huck and wing dancer; Jack Ginger Higgins was the greatest dancer, with his tango twist, which nobody was ever able to duplicate.

Billie King was the greatest situation man; Boots Hope was the greatest ad man, and could talk faster than any other human being; Mamie Smith was the greatest blues singer;

Blatter Beppas and Susie were the greatest comic team; Drake and Walker were the first team to present a band on the stage; Burns and Russell had the longest run at a theatre, remaining at Gibson's Standard Theatre in Philadelphia 11 years.

Next to Billy King, Willie picks Billy Higgins as the tops as a situation man, and admits that he got his start by imitating Higgins. For a long time it was believed Willie would be a black face comedian, but Willie gives the answer by saying he never liked the "black

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Above are shown principals in the unique "Arts of the Theatre" festival scheduled to take place at Hampton Institute next week, July 23-28. Designed to demonstrate the relative effectiveness of various theatre arts, including the dance, the cinema, and the drama, the festival will open Monday evening (July 23) with a recital by Miss Peroux, followed on Tuesday night by a presentation of Dr. Dorsey's folk choral symphony, "Jake and Sue," and "The Forgotten Village." Dr. Dorsey is directing a group of young New York actors in production of "Outward Bound," a contemporary drama, and Shakespeare's "Hamlet," with Gordon Heath in the title role, which will be given later in the week. Sallstad, a member of the faculty of Stephens College, is codirector of the festival.

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## Lillian Smith, Marion Anderson Patrons For Hampton's Festival

HAMPTON INSTITUTE, Va. — Miss Lillian Smith, author of "Strange Fruit," Miss Marion Anderson, singer, and John Willberg, Broadway producer, as well as Miss Hilda Simms, Hampton Institute alumna and star of "Anna Lucasta," are listed as honorary patrons of the week-long "Arts of the Theatre" festival which will open at Hampton Institute next Monday (July 23) with a recital by Miss Peroux, noted dancer.

The festival will demonstrate the relative effectiveness of the various theatre arts, including the dance, the choral symphony, the cinema, the modern drama, and the classical play. It is being sponsored by the Hampton Institute, summer school and directed by Robert J. Sallstad and Owen Dodson.

President and Mrs. Ralph P. Bridger are honorary patrons of the festival, as are J. Henry Scattergood, Dr. Channing H. Toms, Dr. Chester B. Emerson, Dr. Morgan E. Norris, Dr. J. M. G. Ramsey, Capt. Lewis L. Strauss, Willard S. Townsend, and Ralph B. Johnson of the Hampton Institute board of trustees.

Langston Hughes, poet and playwright, Canada Lee and Frederick Loeb, Broadway actors, Anna Fontaines, writer, Commander and the Atlantic S. MacLean, former director of Hampton Institute, Rosamond Glider of Theatre Arts Monthly, and Miss W. M. G. Charters of Stephens College are among those who are actively interested in encouraging a wider appreciation of the arts of the theatre who are listed as honorary patrons for the festival.

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## Heath I O Play Hamlet in Hampton Drama Festival

Hampton Institute, Va. — Gordon Heath, staff announcer for Station WMCA in New York City, and a former student at Hampton Institute, will play the title role of Hamlet next week, during the "Arts of the Theatre" festival at Hampton, July 23-28.

The streamlined production of Shakespeare's masterpiece will climax an unusual series of events at Hampton there in one week outstanding examples of the dance, the folk choral symphony, and the modern and classical stage will be presented in an effort to crystallize for the summer school student body of the college the relative effectiveness of each of these dramatic media. A dance recital by Pearl Primus, John Stembeck's "Forgotten Village" and "Jake and Sue," and Sutton Vanoe's "Outward Bound" will precede the performances of "Hamlet," which will be given in Gordon Heath on the evenings of Thursday and Saturday, July 26 and 28.

Heath, who is a native of New York City, attended the Ethelia Culture School, the High School of Music and Art, College of the New Theatre School before enrolling as a student at Hampton Institute in 1942. While at the Virginia college he appeared as the male lead in Shaw's "Pygmalion" and was active in the Communications Theatre, winning the Rex Williams trophy.

Previously a script writer and actor in N.Y.A. projects over WMCA, Heath also wrote scripts for and acted in the "I'm Your Neighbor" series on WNYC last year, has narrated and acted on the "Ave Maria" hour over WMCA since last October, was narrator for the Pearl Primus show at the Belasco theatre last fall, and has appeared on television programs.

Appointed as WMCA's first Negro announcer in March of this year, Heath also wrote, directed and acted in the "I'm Your Neighbor" series on WNYC last year, has narrated and acted on the "Ave Maria" hour over WMCA since last October, was narrator for the Pearl Primus show at the Belasco theatre last fall, and has appeared on television programs.

### I'VE BEEN AROUND

By TED YATES

**CONSIDER THE SOURCE**

The town's ripping with tongue wagging as several Broadway producers are angling to put on another all-Negro musical comedy. It seems that the intelligencia is resentful of the cost of characters of the last two ("Blue Holiday" and "Memphis Bound") and words spreading too that if a show is to be staged in the near future that writers like Fred Washington, Abe Hill, Joe Bove and Izzy Rowe should be called in (first) to read the script and to okay the prospective cast. Your good-news-boy not mentioned as one who would know anything about show biz. Of course, there is the possibility that he's hanging on his feet (first, again) had nothing to do with all this prattle-tattle. Don't make me laugh, brother.

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JOE DANVILLE Director

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