

Freeman Expands Into Directing

By M.L. LaNEY
Special To The Post

Margaret Freeman is taking advantage of the rich and diverse background of her acting career (she has appeared with Whoopi Goldberg in "The Color Purple," has also appeared in "King Kong Lives," acted in the production of "Bags") for use as director of the upcoming local production of August Wilson's play "Ma Rainey's Blackbottom."

Freeman is directing the play for GM Productions. It's scheduled to be presented by late summer. All cast members are not confirmed, but local musicians Michael Porter, Lerol Paige, Grady Seegars, Lonzel Fleming and Gene Walker are reading for roles. Johnny Holloway, noted saxophonist and bandleader, will be the technical advisor and Donald (Cannonball) McClure will assist as stage technician.

Freeman's plan is to take the talents of locally recognized musicians and utilize them in "Ma Rainey's Blackbottom" which is a play about the members of Ma Rainey's band, The Rabbit Foot Minstrels.

Set in 1927, it was a loose and turbulent time for black entertainers. They performed night after night throughout the deep south courtesy of Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA), otherwise known to mean "Tough On Black Actors." Accommodations were barely tolerable, but top acts were well-paid and Rainey was a top star.

"Ma Rainey's Blackbottom" is a perfect vehicle to convey the



Photo/LaNEY

Margaret Freeman (foreground), director of the local production of "Ma Rainey's Black-

bottom," holds a script reading session with Valca Valentine (l) and Michael Porter.

tensions and rigors of early black celebrities," says Freeman.

"When I think about how I'm going to approach this play and present it to the audience, it's important to denote two factors," she adds. "One, Charlotte audiences respond well to plays with music and to musicals outright. Secondly, there is a growing awareness, a re-kindling of interest in the blues and jazz.

"By paying close attention to those factors, the play should be well-received."

The musicians Freeman's working with are all locally recognized and they have played in a variety of situations from session work with some of today's top names to club dates throughout the country. Acting is another facet of their talents Freeman hopes to develop, while she increases her knowledge of blues and jazz.

She is charging her cast members to exploit the dramatic elements of the play. Currently she is holding drama workshops for the actors/musicians. Script changes and staging suggestions

are discussed during these sessions in the effort to achieve the vision Freeman has for this production.

"There is a recurrence of simple truths within the pathos of the play," says Freeman. "Points to ponder include the pros and cons of musical expertise and commitment, on the one hand, versus the necessity of making a living, on the other."

Freeman is striving for a sterling performance from the musicians that may lead to major theatrical engagements and maybe road tours.

Black Writers Convene This Weekend At Adams Mark

Hundreds of black writers from across the country are expected to attend the 19th annual International Black Writers Conference (IBWC) this weekend at Charlotte's Adams Mark Hotel.

The program begins Friday with registration and exhibits starting at 4 p.m. Friday's evening programs begin at 7 p.m. including dramatic readings that begin at 7:45 p.m.

Workshops will be held throughout the morning and afternoon on Saturday. See chart for workshop titles and times.

A meet the IBWC authors program begins at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday and will be followed by the Alice Browning Awards Banquet at 8 p.m. Les Brown, writer, legislator and motivator, will be the keynote speaker for the banquet. Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, author of *The Avenue*, Clayton City, will receive the Alice Browning Award.

Sunday's events include a Meet the Publishers program at 9:30 a.m., a Songwriter's Luncheon at 11:30 p.m., and a Meet The Press panel discussion beginning at 1:45 p.m.

"I'll Grieve in the Morning," a play by Nathan Ross Freeman will be presented at the Afro-American Cultural Center at 4:15 p.m. Sunday, closing out the weekend's activities.

For more information, please call (704) 343-9745.

Writers Workshops Saturday, June 10

Workshop A	
Copyrighting & Publication	9 a.m. - 10 a.m.
Writing for Children	9 a.m. - 10 a.m.
Young Writers Workshop (ages 12 - 18)	9 a.m. - 10 a.m.
Script Writing/Play Writing	9:45 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.
Workshop B	
Desk Top Publishing	10:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
Lyrics & Song Writing I	10:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
Writing for Hire	10:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
Workshop C	
Journalism	1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Word Expressions	1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Trade, Technical & Professional Journals	1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Workshop D	
Lyrics & Song Writing II	1:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Poetry & Prose	1:30 - 3:45 p.m.
Motivational Workshop	1:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Workshop E	
Fiction & Non Fiction	2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Political Writing	2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Editing	2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

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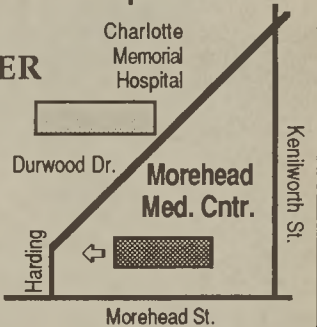
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