

A "Gem" of a Play by Wilson

The ten ages of the late August Wilson's play cycle chronicle the Black experience through several decades of life in America as it was lived, to some extent, by those who'd made the dangerous passage on slave ships from Africa, then by the Underground Rail Road as freemen, or fugitives from the slave-owning states of the South. "Gem of the Ocean", which was chronologically the first play in the cycle, is being reprised at the Fountain Theatre at a significant moment in history when it's possible, some hope probable, that an African American could become President of the United States. The play is a stunning cri-de-coeur, taking painful jabs at the soul and cracking open the heart. When Citizen Barlow (a sturdy Keith Arthur Bolden), whose Mama must have applied a heap of wishful thinking at his christening, bursts into Aunt Ester's house. He must have known he was courting danger, but his need was so great and the forces working against him so strong that he was compelled to seek the help of the famed Aunt Ester, whose house in the Hill district of Pittsburgh was recognized as a safe harbor for the unloved, the under-appreciated and the needy. Barlow, badly treated by the mill owners, underpaid and cheated of the couple of dollars he was paid in

Mad About Theatre



by Madeleine Shaner

the name of leaves for a minimal amount of food and a shared bed, had stolen a bucket of nails from the mill. The mill owners, itching to catch the thief, laid the blame on an innocent man, who took the line of least resistance and jumped into the river, an innocent man who preferred to stage his own death. Knowing he can't get away for long, and feeling a 'hole in his soul', Citizen Barlow breaks into the home of Aunt Ester (a splendidly formidable Juanita Jennings), a reputedly 287 year old shaman, asking her to "wash his soul" so he can get on with his life.

Ester's house is a sanctuary for fugitives fleeing slavery, and anyone who needs food in his stomach and some kind of peace in his heart. Those seeking solace and sustenance present a very special group of strong-minded characters who've battled the odds, but are aware it's only temporary. If the Devil don't get 'em, the City-



photo by Ed Krieger

Tene Carter Miller and Rodney Gardiner star in "Gem of The Ocean".

employed 'Negro' policeman will. Aunt Ester, an ex-slave who became a conductor on the URR (Underground Rail Road) is an eccentric old bird with a rough tongue and a heart as big as the ocean. She constantly fights inhumanity and injustice, and has a long record - 287 years, she says, of washing people's souls clean. Eli (a spirited Jeris Lee Poindexter), Ester's tough-minded gatekeeper and protector (though Lord knows, she's her own best guardian), doubles as resident lap dog, and fierce pitbull when bared fangs are required. Black Mary, housekeeper and a key part of Ester's home security system, is stunningly played by Tene Carter Miller, despite the disapproval and constant interference of her bullying brother, Caesar (scarily fine Rodney Gardiner) who, in the tradition of the top dog being the meanest, uses his city-appointed position to keep his uppity black brothers in their place.

The centerpiece of this eclectic group is Solly Two Kings (Adolphus Ward in a magnetic, royally huge performance), another URR conductor who's still in the business and more than a bit in love with Ester, and with the danger of aiding the disenfranchised to get to America or Canada. Also on the team is Rutherford Selig (a likeable Stephen Marshall), an itinerant ped-

dlar, the only white man in the play. Aunt Ester, steeped in voodoo lore, stages an ecstatic vision quest that takes the haunted Citizen Barlow on a miraculous journey over the ocean on a paper boat to The City of Bones, where dead slaves lie beneath the sea, and where Citizen may be able to locate his distressed soul. Well-staged by director Ben Bradley, with settings by Travis Gale Lewis, lighting by Christian Epps, projections by Marc Rosenthal, costumes by Naila Aladdin Sanders, and sound by David B. Marling, it's a stunning set piece of magical realism that is a play in itself. While this scene is theatrical and well-executed, it's a lengthy distraction for the audience who must try to figure out its meaning, as well as the symbols that represent the magical voyage, while still in the process of digesting Wilson's wordy text, which additionally confounds those not familiar with Black English.

The acting is superb, however, and there's no doubt we're carried away emotionally on the wings of a good story, with everyone involved in the production really being there.

Presented by and at The Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Ave., L.A. Thursday to Saturday at 8:00pm., Sundays at 2:00pm., through November 16. (323)663-1525 or www.fountaintheatre.com.



Photo by Ed Krieger

From left, Keith Arthur Bolden, Juanita Jennings and Jeris Lee Poindexter star in "Gem of the Ocean".

Kudos to Joan's

Assemblymember Mike Feuer, 42nd District, has named Joan's on Third as the 2008 Small Business of the Year in the 42nd Assembly District. Assembly members annually select one small business for the award from the thousands of businesses in their districts. The award is sponsored by the California Small Business Association.

"Joan's on Third exemplifies how creativity and drive can transform an innovative idea into a local success story," Feuer said. "Joan and her remarkable business are well-known for top quality products, exceptional service, and a rapidly-expanding, loyal customer base. Beyond these achievements, though, it is Joan's commitment to her community and her staff that really stands out."

In 1995, Joan McNamara opened Joan's on Third as a small catering company at 8350 W. 3rd Street. It has grown into a popular eatery. "We were delighted that Joan's on Third was selected to receive the 42nd Assembly District Small Business of the Year Award," McNamara said.

Should I Have a "Living Trust?"

Most of you who have read my column over the past year are familiar with the term, "Living Trust," otherwise known as a "Revocable Trust." As the California State Bar has indicated, a "living trust can provide for the management of your assets...when you are unable to do so...When you are incapacitated, your (successor) trustee can assume responsibility for your assets in an accountable fashion...without court supervision...At your death, the trustee acts as much as an executor would," again *without the necessity for court intervention*.

While, in the opinion of this author, a living trust has previously had many advantages over a mere will, particularly where there is an estate in excess of *one hundred thousand dollars*, the advantages to a living trust are even greater in light of California legislation which became effective on January 1, 2002, regarding the compensation of attorneys and executors where *probate* is involved.

For example, if your gross estate is \$250,000 this new legislation authorizes the payment of statutory attorney's fees in an amount in excess of \$8,000.00. A "commission" of an additional \$8,000.00 is also to be allowed as compensation to the executor. This total sum of \$16,000.00 can be substantially avoided by the proper establishment and operation of a living trust.

The rising costs of probate administration and the legislature's recognition of those costs are not unwarranted. At the same time, your undertaking the preparation of an appropriate estate plan, often involving the preparation of a living trust, is of even greater financial benefit today than previously.

For more information about Living Trusts, contact **KRAMER LAW GROUP**
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PumpkinLiners
 Every Saturday & Sunday in October
 10am 12pm 2:00pm & 4:00pm

At Ichatobg enjoy BBQ food, arts & crafts, bouncy houses, garden items, and much more, then find "your" perfect pumpkin and bring it back on the train.
 Pumpkins priced separately starting at \$1.
Adults \$15 Youth 4-12 \$8 Child 2-3 \$6

Headless Horseman Family Dinner Train
 October 10, 15, 17, 19, 24 & 26
 Depart:7:00pm Returns:approx 9:30pm

Ride the train to our remote Pumpkin Patch (the last place the Headless Horseman was seen), and feast on a BBQ tri-tip and chicken dinner. Then, if you dare, embark on a daring search for the Headless Horseman.
Adults \$43 Youth 4-12 \$28 Children 2-3 \$20

Murder Mystery Dinner Train
"FRIGHT NIGHT"
 October 11, 18 & 25
 Depart:6:30pm Returns:approx 9:30pm

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