

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

THEATER

A powerful tribute to black womanhood

FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF

By Ntozake Shange

Directed by Oz Scott, choreography by Paula Moss

Featured actresses: Trazana Beverly, Laurie Carlos, Aku Kadojo, Janet League, Paula Moss and Seret Scott

"I found god in myself and I love her fiercely."

On this note Ntozake Shange concludes her powerful tribute to black womanhood, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, which is scheduled for a nationwide tour in the 1977-78 season under the auspices of the Theatre Guild.

The play, which played to full houses on Broadway for an entire season and won several prestigious awards, is both a consciousness-raising experience and a collective biography, in which the playwright records the pain and triumph of black women in the dual struggle for identity as blacks and as women.

The opening episodes deal with girlhood encounters with the glories of the black past and the realities of the present. A black teenager flees her home in New Jersey for the salsa halls of the South Bronx and a culture with which she can identify. An eight-year-old bookworm discovers "my first black man"—Toussaint L'Ouverture—in the adult section of the neighborhood library. Book in hand she leaves her integrated block, neighborhood and school and sets out for Haiti,

only to discover among the debris of the Louisville ghetto another Toussaint—Toussaint Jones—who orders her to follow him to the docks.

As the characters cross the threshold of womanhood, Shange introduces the second major theme of the play: the conflict between the need for sexual fulfillment and the difficulty of creating satisfactory relationships with black men. (This conflict is also at the heart of Shange's new novel, *Sassafrass*, Shameful Hussy Press, 1976.) "Women lose all personal rights in the presence of a man" one of the characters in *Colored Girls* says.

During the next section, Shange explores some of the ways women allow themselves to be used in exchange for the transitory pleasure of sexual fulfillment. There is an amusing tale of courtship via poems and plants. There is the "passion flower of L.A.," who ends her nights of pleasure demanding that her guests leave before dawn. (It's her policy to sleep alone and record her impressions in a journal.) Climaxing this section is the sinuous dance of Sechia, mythic goddess of the Nile and the incarnation of Mississippi River love.

"Colored girls have no right to sorrow" but they do have a right to pain, to their own bitter tears, to the "stuffs" that make up the fabric of their life and identity. It is the assertion of this right that sets them on the path of liberation. There is a sequence where the characters mimic favorite male excuses, the funniest being, "But baby, you know I was high." In a more serious vein,

they defy their "lowdown, no account" brothers to be themselves rather than what society expects them to be.

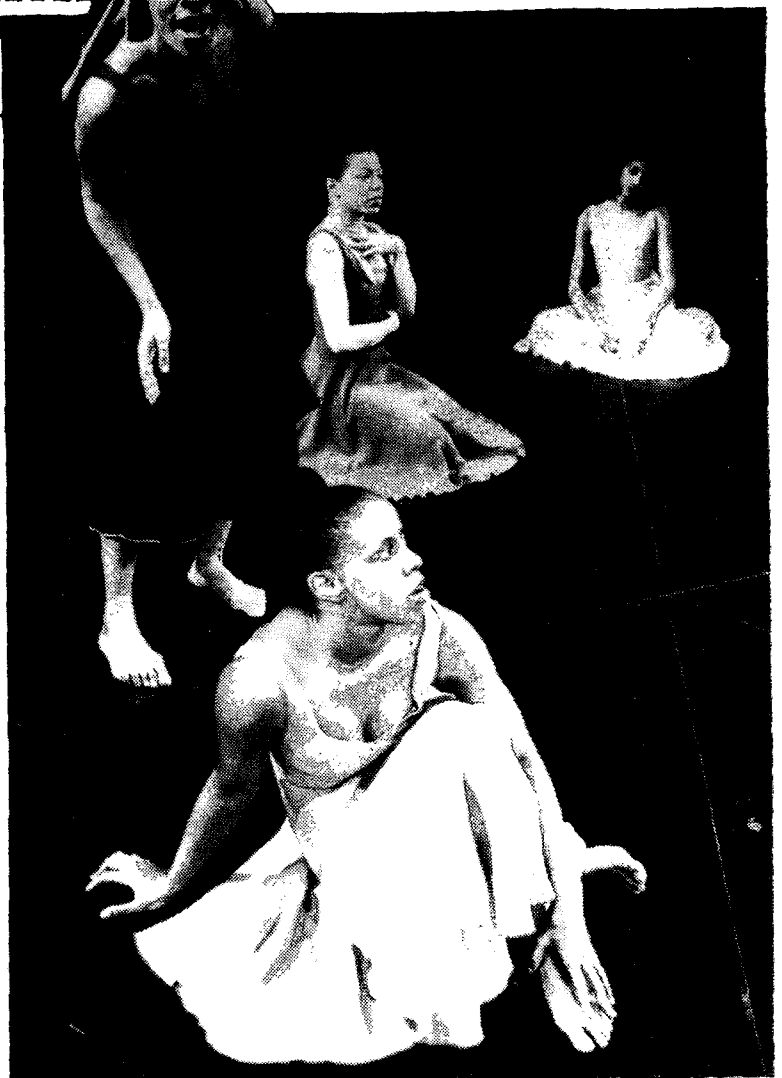
What finally leads to catharsis and unity among the characters is the recognition that the values of phallic power breed physical and emotional death. In the searing monologue, based on the poem, "a nite with beau willie brown," a 22-year-old Vietnam veteran, crazed by the war, the responsibilities of a family and no money, flings his two children from a fifth-floor window while their mother looks on. The harrowing narrative draws the characters together. In a laying-on of hands, they affirm their solidarity and new-found strength as women independent of men.

Splendidly acted, directed and written, *Colored Girls* has broken important ground in the American commercial theater. It was the only play on Broadway last season that spoke seriously to the black experience, and the only one to address the problem of women fashioning new roles for themselves. Hence its broad appeal.

In *Sassafrass*, Shange's protagonist dreams of creating "new images for blk folks," "new worlds" that will vindicate "all the african and indian dieties/ disgraced by the comin of the white/ man" and "make present our beauty." With *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, the writer makes good her promise.

—Lynn Garafola

Lynn Garafola writes regularly for *In These Times*.



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learn how to govern their own future.

—Barry Commoner
author, *The Poverty of Power*

ART

Boston artists boycott show

Making artists pay for the chance to show their work is "antithetical," says Harold Tovish, a well-known sculptor and member of the Boston Visual Artists Union. "To use a stronger word, it's exploitation."

Thirty years ago, Tovish sent a large sculpture to a competition in Kansas City, paying \$5 to enter and \$17 for shipping, at a time when he was earning \$2100 a year. "I thought it was ludicrous," he recalls, "and I never did it again."

Hundreds of art competitions and open exhibitions across the country have discovered that charging artists entry fees is easier than seeking government or corporate funding. Frequently, artists whose work is rejected subsidize cash awards to those whose work is accepted. Actors and musicians would be outraged if they had to pay for the privilege of auditioning; yet many artists consistently shell out fees they can't afford, under the illusion that "as long as it's exposure, it's justified."

The practice of charging entry fees is not limited to small operations. It is also used by such prestigious institutions as the Worcester (Mass.) Art Museum, which this year solicited entries for a juried biennial exhibition to be hung June 11 to August 7. Any artist in the state was welcome to deliver two objects, along with \$4 per entry, for "The Massachusetts Open." The works would not be insured by the museum. No liability of any kind was assumed. The museum would retain a 20 percent commission on sales of work chosen for the show and would dole out \$4,250 in prize money.

The conditions of the competition drew fire from the fair practices committee of the Boston Visual Artists Union (BVAU), which represents nearly 1,000 artists. When the museum administration refused to drop the entry fee, to provide insurance, or to meet with committee representatives, the BVAU and the 30-member Worcester Artists Union took their protest to the sidewalk. During

the five-day entry period at the end of May, artists bringing work into the museum were politely confronted by colleagues with picket signs.

Carol McMahon of the BVAU fair practices committee believes that several hundred artists stayed away from the Worcester competition because of the protest. Only two BVAU members submitted work. "We tried to reach artists in other parts of the state, but weren't always able to," she says. Some who brought their works a long distance were reluctant to turn around and take them back. But McMahon estimates that about 60 who got as far as the museum steps decided against crossing the picket lines.

The museum's public relations director Jean Connor claims that 1,752 works by 1,040 artists were submitted despite the protest. (If so, the museum collected about \$7,000 in entry fees.) Connor justifies the charge on the grounds

Continued on page 23.

NEXT WEEK IN THESE TIMES

Diana Johnstone from Israel's view of Carter; David France on the movement against nuclear power; Harry Boyte on the Citizen's Action Movement; David Mandel on

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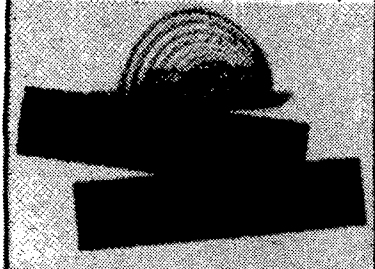
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Recommended Records

THE BEATLES AT THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL



THE BEATLES AT THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL
The Beatles
Capitol Records

The successful release of an album in 1977 made from tapes of Beatles concerts in 1964 and 1965 is testament to a number of things: the nostalgia that many people feel for the days of their innocent youth; the quality of the Beatles' music; the press-fanned desire for a Beatles reunion; and last, but not least, the venality of George Martin and Capitol Records.

There's no doubt that this album delivers what a lot of folks are buying it for—fond memories, a rush of recognition. Anyone who was a Beatles fan in the mid-'60s will get a warm feeling from hearing the screams of thousands of ecstatic teenagers at these concerts. Together with the photographs and other memorabilia included on the dust jacket and album cover, some of the ambience of Beatlemania has been successfully recreated.

Musically, however, there is little reason to listen to *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl*. Although the album proves the oft-stated (though not particularly important) opinion of rock critics that the Beatles could perform well before a live audience and were not just a studio-bound group, few of the songs are improvements on the old studio cuts. Most are, despite the valiant efforts of '70s technologists to restore tapes made in the unsophisticated '60s, not very clear, though I suppose there is some historical value in hearing only John Lennon's low harmony and not Paul McCartney's higher lead vocal on "She Loves You."

The cuts which impressed me most were, surprisingly, two of the ones not written by Lennon and McCartney. The version of Chuck Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven" features very strong George Harrison guitar work, and Paul belts out an extremely powerful vocal on "Long Tall Sally," the Little Richard song. And it goes almost without saying that John is as witty as ever, and Ringo is still a mediocre drummer. But overall, about the nicest thing one can say is that this album shows that the Beatles had a lot of energy when playing before an excited and adoring crowd.

Despite the fact that Capitol Records has been making a bundle by re-releasing the old Beatles albums and new packages of Beatles singles and has launched a huge publicity drive designed to recreate Beatlemania, George Martin has thechutzpah to claim in the liner notes that he worked on this album as "a labor of love." And Jimmy Carter has never told a lie to the American people.

Don't get me wrong. I love the Beatles. But since their old albums are still available, *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl* is of

interest primarily to the stockholders of Capitol Industries-EMI, Inc.

—Bruce Dancis

Bruce Dancis reviews regularly for In These Times.

THE BEATLES LIVE! AT THE STAR-CLUB

Lingasing Records

Live at the Star Club was recorded when the Beatles were still an unknown pub band, wearing sleek black leather and entertaining small crowds with endless repetitions of other peoples' musical compositions. The group would sometimes travel from their home base of Liverpool to play in Hamburg, and one night in mid-1962 they were recorded on a home tape recorder that utilized one microphone. All four sides of this collection are poorly recorded, but still retain vitality and importance for any rock afficianado.

Live at the Star Club documents the debt the Beatles owed to black American rock and roll artists like Chuck Berry. They cover four of his songs and George can be heard stumbling over the first few chords to the opening of "Roll Over Beethoven" while the band wheels through the tune with a reverent ferocity. Rockabilly in the music of Carl Perkins is present, and so are Phil Spector, Little Richard, Ray Charles and Lieber and Stoller. This was the music that the Beatles fed on while preparing their own unique voice and contribution to contemporary music.

The album is interesting for its defects. I'm not referring to the recording quality. That's a small price to pay for the rare chance of catching the group at such an early stage of its career. But this is the group at its most distant and jarring, before they cleaned up their act and conquered the world; the quintessential punks, proud of it and of their music!

It displays the jagged sounds of a group still stuck in the black-board jungle mystique. They understand where they're coming from but haven't quite figured out their final destination. You can hear members groping for a unique sound that occasionally flashes out in the beautiful harmonies of "Mr. Moonlight." This is the quality that affected the Beatles' music throughout their history and contributed to their power as innovators.

Fifteen years later it still shines through.

—Joe Heumann

Joe Heumann reviews regularly for In These Times.



GOD SAVE THE QUEEN/DID YOU NO WRONG
The Sex Pistols
Virgin Records (import) 45 rpm

During the week of Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee, the #1 hit in England was "God Save the Queen"—but not to the tune that

was ripped off for "My Country 'Tis of Thee." This anthem, claiming that the Queen is "no human being" and calling for an end to the "fascist regime," is performed by Rock's latest outrage, the Sex Pistols.

Even before this timely release, the Pistols had got plenty of notoriety. They invented the safety-pin-through-the-cheek genre of punk chic and have inspired widespread revulsion the likes of which hasn't been seen since the Stones wore dirty sweatshirts on the Ed Sullivan show.

The Pistols' first single, "Anarchy in the UK" has been banned from every TV and radio station in the country. Their music has been kicked off BBC. And they are now the Hottest New Thing. A number of record companies, however, have found the Pistols too hot to handle and dropped them before they could produce an album.

They were finally picked up by Virgin Records, who released "God Save the Queen"—the only Pistols pressing available as an import, which you should try to lay your hands on at all costs.

In all the brouhaha, the Sex Pistols' detractors and defenders have ignored the crucial element of any band—the music. And the Pistols, let there be no doubt, are one hell of a band. The energy in lead singer Johnny Rotten's howling vocals explodes off the grooves in an uncontained, uncontrollable attack against whatever it is you've got, while the group slashes and pounds behind him.

"Queen" is a bit too calculated as an insult to be spontaneous and is burdened with "meaningful" lyrics. But "Did You No Wrong" is an all-out assault, reminiscent of the early Velvet's "White Light/White Heat" and a defiance that recalls the Who's "My Generation" (a group also widely reviled in its heyday for the wanton onstage destruction of equipment during performance).

In spirit the Pistols are closest to Iggy Pop (known to be capable of anything as long as someone finds it obnoxious) and as of this writing the Pistols' next single is scheduled to be a version of the Stooge's classic, "No Fun."

As rockers like the Sex Pistols push the limits of tolerance to a new edge, reaction to them grows in violence. Johnny Rotten, whose blunt-axe haircut and ripped-up suits held together with pins and staples, have captured the hearts of second-generation punk-rockers, was recently surrounded in a parking lot and knifed in the face by a band of royalist Teddy Boys, intent on teaching him respect for the Crown.

On the other hand, acceptance may be just around the corner. British designer Zandra Rhodes has introduced the "punk look" in haute couture—strategically torn frocks held together with jeweled pins—price: \$500 and up. What hath Rotten wrought?

—P. Hertel



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The film is the work of Green Mountain Post Films, makers of the much-honored *Lovejoy's Nuclear War*. Its opening is part of a worldwide citizens' action commemorating the 32nd anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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BOOKS

Seven very radical women

SEVEN WOMEN, Portraits from the American Radical Tradition

By Judith Nies
Viking Press, 1976, \$8.95

The subtitle of this admirable book, *Portraits from the American Radical Tradition*, is a clue to the author's purpose. Radicals have been robbed twice over of something of which we have present need.

Most schoolbook American history has been taught so as to make our radical tradition almost invisible and mostly distorted. The true radical tradition is emerging, but it is not yet in full light. And there are almost no women revealed by it. Judith Nies begins here to restore the great women radicals to the tradition, knowing that to think of these heroic women simply as fighters for women's suffrage and women's rights is to impoverish both the present women's liberation movement and the larger political tradition of which it is a part.

After revelations of the poi-

troonery of such strong-holds of liberalism as the top command of Harvard University (cradle of presidents' advisors during the filthy '50s), it has been a cleansing experience to read this uncompromising account of uncompromising women, who—in the face of crushing obstacles, tragedies and threats—did not yield an inch to the enemy, refused to soften their message, behaved not only with physical and moral courage, but with the special courage of clear and powerfully effective intellects. The seven knew what they were doing and why they were doing it.

Some of them learned earlier than others. Anna Louise Strong, who was the youngest student ever to receive a PhD from the University of Chicago, took a great deal longer to learn the right use of mental and moral power than Harriet Tubman. The condition of slavery is a rapid teacher to the slave. But there is also Sara Grimke, daughter of slave-owners in Charleston, who at the age of five

was found on the wharf, demanding passage to a land where servants were not whipped. Many crowded years later the same Sara Grimke, speaking on the realities of slavery to a white female audience, asked, "Can any American woman look at these scenes of shocking license and cruelty and fold her hands in apathy and say, 'I have nothing to do with slavery'?" That is a question that has enjoyed a long and painful life and is not answered yet.

Harriet Tubman in this portrait is no "legendary figure." She is a guerilla general, deserving of a place in the hagiology of abolition as elevated as that of Frederick Douglass, more real than many living rulers of states. The same can be said of Mother Jones, another of the seven: her organizing genius, her selflessness and powerful love of the working class, her eloquence, her courage are no legend. Is there a male labor leader worthy to stand next to her?

In the portraits of Elizabeth

Cady Stanton, the under-rated and remarkable Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Grimke and Anna Louise Strong, we are looking at women of the educated middle class who refused to let their station in life keep them quiet and "lady-like." The refusal in the first three cases cost dearly, and although Anna Louise Strong had no family tyrants to torture her, she surely paid her dues in other ways.

I stood by her grave in the Cemetery of Revolutionary Heroes in Peking in 1973 and felt it deeply fitting that she should lie there. This most brilliant and dedicated of reporters not only hated injustice, but came to understand what had to be done to end it. She loved—with a critical love—the Chinese Revolution. She helped make it happen and helped countless members of my generation, who have been living through the ugliest stages of moribund imperialism, to have real hope for the future.

Dorothy Day is the last of the

Some learned earlier than others... Anna Louise Strong took a great deal longer than Harriet Tubman. Slavery is a rapid teacher to the slave.

seven. Without her, where would the peace movement be today? Where the magnificent young Catholic leaders in struggle against war, racism and poverty? Where would I—a devout atheist—be without having caught glimpses of *The Catholic Worker* in my middle years. I am glad she is alive and that Judith Nies ends her fine book with this fine portrait.

—Frances Putnam Fritchman

Frances Fritchman is an activist Unitarian and was a friend of Anna Louise Strong.

Three not so very radical women

LOOSE CHANGE

By Sara Davidson
Doubleday & Company, 1977,
\$9.50

Sara Davidson wrote *Loose Change*, a book about herself and two other young women, to break the power that images of the '60s continue to have for her and for many other people. Excerpts have appeared in *Esquire* and the *Village Voice*, and the book is being touted as "...a major work of social history, a landmark book on what it was like to be young in America in the 1960s."

Loose Change is not a decisive social history. But it is an engrossing chronicle of manners and morality for people who were or are inclined to feel that Berkeley is the center of the world. This geocentricism may seem a bit bizarre; but in the '60s and early '70s, the University of California and its environs became a "national monument" partly because of extensive media coverage, and also because of genuine political and personal struggle.

Between 1960 and 1972, the Bay area was a wellspring of social movements that briefly captured the fears and fantasies of a nation. Political events included anti-HUAC demonstrations (1960), civil disobedience at the Sheraton Palace Hotel (1964), Free Speech Movement (1964), Vietnam Day (1965), Student Strike (1966), Stop the Draft Week (1967), Third World Strike (1968), and People's Park (1969). These incidents were emblems of more general social movements that took root in California: civil rights organizing, student power, anti-war campaigns, human potential movements and women's liberation.

All three of the main characters in *Loose Change* were touched in some ways by these movements. Only one woman, Susie, remained politically active and stayed in Berkeley for most of the decade. The other two friends, Sara and Tasha, drifted from California to Manhattan where they became inte-

Right: Sara Davidson

grated into the subcultures of expansive "new journalism" and expensive "new art." (A fourth woman, Candy, who is a psychoanalyst in London, refused to be interviewed for the book.)

Although the women took very different paths from the time they left their plush sorority house in 1962 until they rediscovered one another through interviews with Sara 10 years later, they all shared a class privilege that softened their personal and political risks. Each had been raised as a Jewish American Princess in Los Angeles and could return to Southern California for financial and emotional support when the going got rough.

Like many other college kids who were part of the Kennedy generation, Sara, Susie and Tasha believed they had the ability and the obligation to shape the nation's future:

...There were good people and bad people and we could tell them apart by a look or by words spoken in code. We were certain we belonged to a generation that was special. We did not need or care about history because we had sprung from nowhere... We had glimpsed a new world where nothing would be the same and we had packed our bags.

Davidson sometimes laughs at her own naivete; at other times longs for it. Her book as a whole reflects a similar contradiction. In some settings her characters mouth platitudes; in others they grapple with the real complexities of life.

While remaining sympathetic to the left, Davidson appears to have opted for a combination of communalism, psychotherapy and mysticism. She neither recognizes nor explores the full impact of feminism and Marxism on the people she knew. Her book fails as both a social history and as a guide for future action because it lacks clear political analysis of any sort. The absence of such analysis is particularly important to



note because *Loose Change* is being publicized as a book that not only describes, but also explains the '60s.

The best part of the book is its descriptions. There are passages when it is possible to taste the espresso in a Berkeley cafe or become a silent participant in a familiar argument. But the only ma-

nor lesson to be learned from these reminiscences is that transition is slow, painful, and often unexpected.

For Berkeleyphiles, *Loose Change* is a wonderful jigsaw puzzle of people and places. It also rates high as diverting reading with plenty of dope and sex. It is, however, neither a useful nor an

important work. Detail does not compensate for lack of depth, and Sara Davidson never gets "Beyond the Valley of the Liberals."

—Mimi Goldman

Mimi Goldman is a former Jewish Princess who escaped California to teach sociology at the University of Oregon.

Boston artists boycott show

Continued from page 21.

that the show cost the museum about \$24,000. Actually some of that cost is overhead and would apply if there were no show. Another kind of exhibition would have involved even larger costs because works would have had to be insured.

"The point is, if we weren't having this show," says Connor, "these artists wouldn't have the opportunity to exhibit here." Most of those who entered didn't have the opportunity anyway, for the galleries set aside for the Massachusetts Open could accommodate only 120 to 150 works.

A vice-president of the museum who talked with BVAU pickets was more candid. Surprised by the protest, he explained that the idea behind the exhibition was

fundraising. An admission fee was charged viewers, and special entertainments were scheduled to draw larger-than-usual crowds.

The BVAU protest action is as much to educate the artists as it is to educate exhibiting institutions," says painter and BVAU member Lois Tarlow. "It's like the women's movement: they don't know they're getting screwed until it's called to their attention." There was a time during the '50s, Tarlow recalls, when a local chapter of Artists Equity managed to eliminate entry fees throughout New England, but Artists Equity "sort of died out here and entry fees crept back like a fungus."

Change is in the making, however. Artists Equity, the American Artists Congress and the Na-

tional Endowment for the Arts have all adopted resolutions opposing entry fees and endorsing proper insurance. Under its new guidelines, which take effect in 1978, the NEA will not fund art organizations that derive income from artists whose work they exhibit. (Similar NEA rules already apply to the performing arts.) Other Massachusetts museums—DeCordova in Lincoln and Danforth in Framingham—have run successful competitions without entry fees and with insurance. And the "Artists in Exile" exhibit (see *ITT*, June 22) was funded by BVAU members who raised \$7,000 from private sources.

—Judy Polumbaum

Judy Polumbaum is a graduate student in journalism.