The Little Theater at Howard

In this day when real drama is at a premium, when the American stage is flooded with second rate plays, the folk theater or little theatre movement over the country is of vast importance. Especially is the movement at Howard University significant for the Negro. This project, fostered by a few art-loving, sacrificing souls, who have a big vision, has for its goal the building of a Little Theatre at Howard University to be the home of Negro drama. It is to be a place where dramas written by, for, and about Negroes will be produced.

The work of the Department of Dramatic Art has been significant and illustrious. The past few years have brought many opportunities, and have seen many plays well done. Youth has come, has caught the vision of the art, and has gone out, bigger, finer, for having had the dramatic experience.

A few of those who have caught the vision and “carry on” are Ottie Graham whose power in acting and dancing bids fair to contribute much to art; Evelyn Lightner, who reached a great degree of perfection in the art of designing costumes and left behind a worthy successor in Alma Thomas; T. J. Hopkins who has done splendid work in the field of stage technique, and Margaret Smith who developed the business management to a marked degree.

Some splendid performances have been given under auspicious circumstances, receiving high and favorable comment. Among them may be mentioned: “Thais”; “The Emperor Jones”; “As Strong as the Hills”; “Simon the Cyrenian”; and “The Pagoda Slave.” To behold “Simon the Cyrenian,” one of the most distinguished audiences ever gathered to see a dramatic performance was in Rankin Memorial Chapel as our guests: the members of the Disarmament Conference at Washington. But indeed, these are by no means the most significant performances though they may have been the most brilliant.

Since this movement is to foster original Negro drama, and since no race can truly and greatly portray the experiences of a race with an entirely different culture behind it, the “bits” of plays, though modest in composition and sometimes not plays at all, written by Negroes, portraying Negro life, have been the signal steps of progress in the life of the Dramatic Department, making it certain that long and significant strides have been made towards the goal. The first of these pieces is a dramatic episode from the life of Tousaint L’Ouverture called “Genefriede,” by Helen Webb Harris, 23. It is a gripping thing full of intense action. The second, called “The Yellow Tree,” by De Reath Irene Busey, 18, is a simple study of superstition in a mid-western Negro family, as the Washington Daily News puts it, “excellently made and powerfully written . . . . It is the stuff of which tragedy is made.” Next in the list comes “The Death Dance,” a story of African tribal life written by Theina Duncan, 24. It is interesting, full of action, gripping, convincing. These are the cornerstones laid for the Negro Folk Theater at Howard University.

Many people, interested in America’s contribution to dramatic art, believe that it will come from the Negro. Mr. Raymond O’Neill says that because the white American is of an old race, restrained, by years of training, by his work, by his Puritan traditions, he will never make any great emotional contribution to the art of acting. From the Negro, young in race, free, untrammeled by traditions, will come this rare contribution as it has come from him in music.
When the Negro realizes his opportunity and begins to unite, act, and produce his own plays in large numbers, presenting them to the world for their own value, for their value as they are purely Negro, simple plays of Negro life without propaganda, portraying Negro ideals, strivings, ambitions, longings, sorrows, joys, hopes, it will be the most eloquent of pleas for justice and equal opportunity that has ever been uttered. Art knows no race or creed. When the Negro gets his case before the world in drama; when the world sees that the Negro's soul is like the soul of every other human, the race problem will disappear.

In a few years the realization of a Little Theater at Howard University and many other great dramatic accomplishments for the art drama of America must come to those who strive so unceasingly; and immortally entwined in the future art drama of this Little Theater, of this race indeed, will be the names of Montgomery Gregory, Alain LeRoy Locke and Marie Moore-Forrest who have given of themselves so unstintingly.

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"FORGOTTEN SOULS"
By David Pinski
Lizzie Ehrlich Geraldine Neale
Fanny Siegel Theresa Cohen
Hinde George Davis

"THE DEATH DANCE"
By Thelma Duncan, 24
Kamo—the accused—Parvis J. Chesson
Asamana—the maid of Val—Kathleen Hilyer
Bumabi—the medicine man—Jos. Nicholson
Ahma—assistant to medicine man—Bernard Walton
Warriors of Val—T. C. Hall, P. Helm, A. Burke, L. W. Norton
Natives of Val—J. C. Young, D. Turpeau
J. D. Peacey, J. C. Watts, E. M. Morell

"THE MAKER OF DREAMS"
By Othelma Damm
Pierrot—Jemima Newsom
Pierrette—Grace Nash
The Manufacturer—Alfred Smith

"THE PAGODA SLAVE"
By Charles Keeler
Priest—H. I. Hoffman
Teo Merchant—E. Henby
The Groom—Horace Scott
The Rangoon Girl—Evelyn Lewis
The Groom's Mother—Gladys Turner
The Bride—Margaret Lawrence
The Boy—Frank Williams
The Groom's Father—August Terence
The Dancing Girls of the Pagoda—Irene Salisbury, Lilla March, Velma Young, Gladys Peters, Hazel Harvey, Mae Harper.

SCENES FROM SHAKESPEARE

"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"
(Scene from)
Portia—Ellen Mills
Nerissa—Marcella Dumas

"MID-SUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM"
(Scene from)
Orlando—J. C. Young
Rosalind—Mac Harper

"ROMEO AND JULIET"
(Scene from)
Romeo—Melvin Green
Juliet—Dorothy Gillam
SCENE FROM "GENEFRIEDE"

J. W. NICHOLSON,
The Mighty Medicine Man of the
"Death Dance"