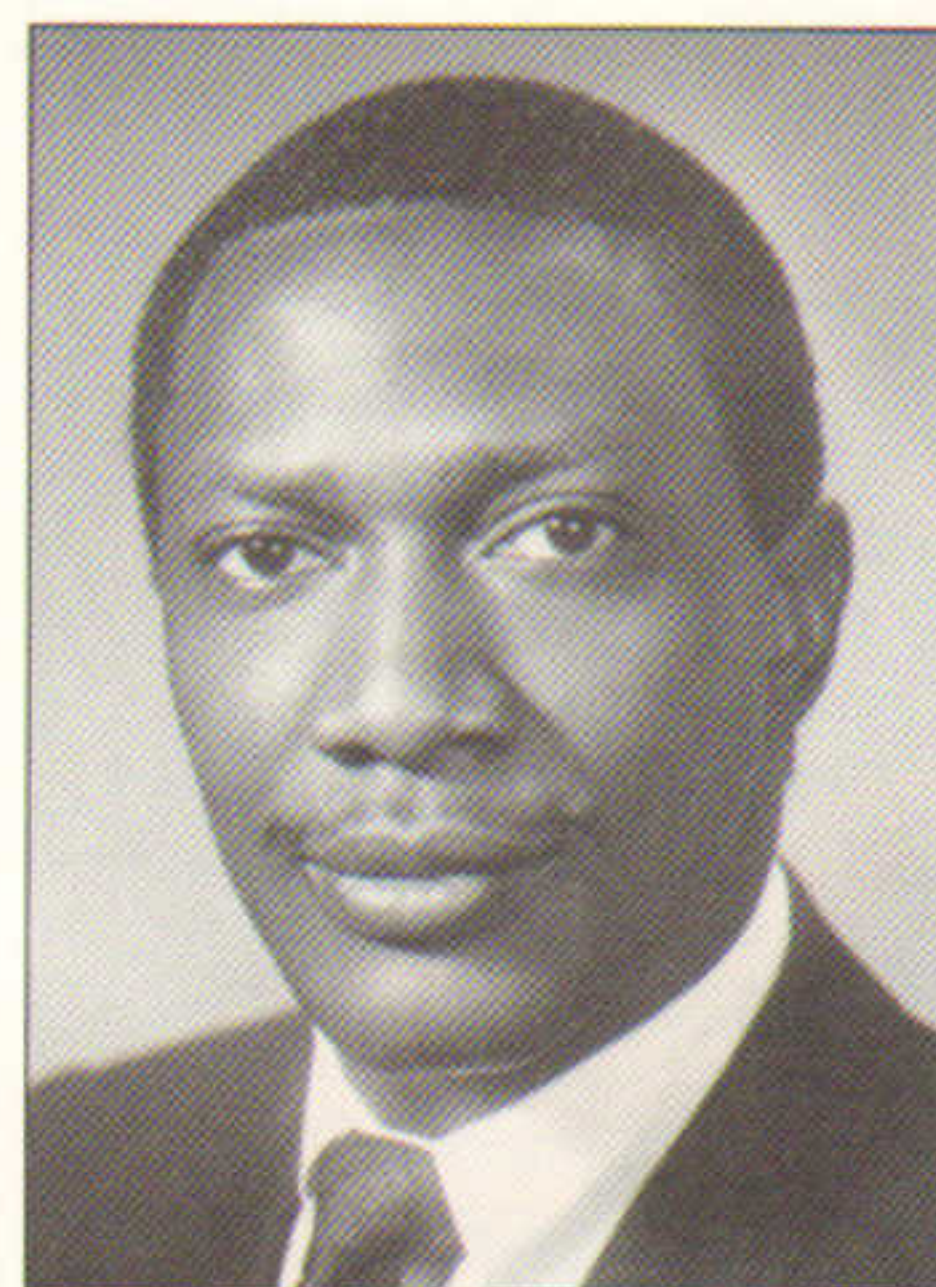
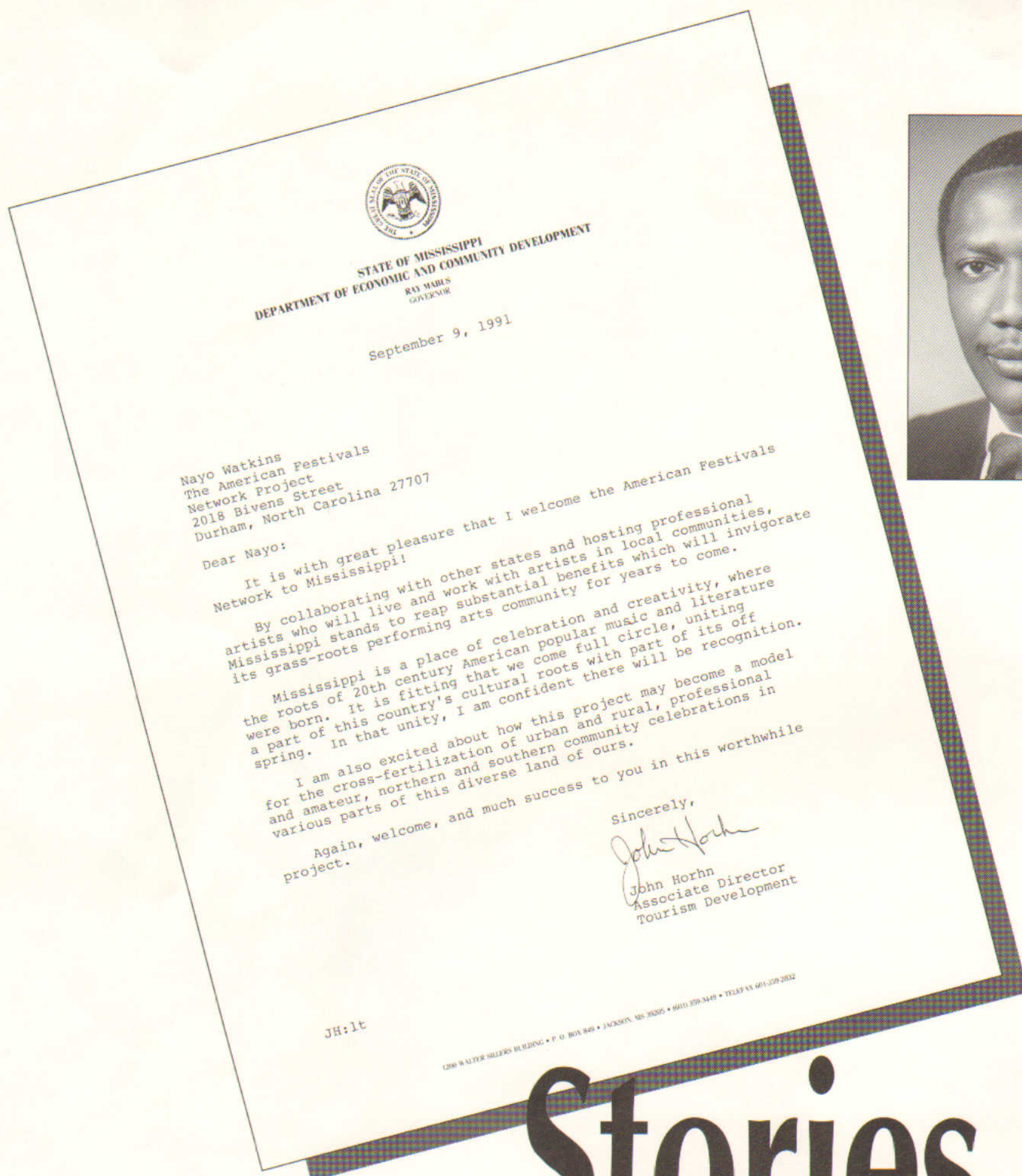




MISSISSIPPI
AMERICAN
FESTIVAL
PROJECT



John Horhn has been active in the arts in Mississippi for a number of years. He was born in Goodman and grew up in Jackson. After receiving a degree in Dramatic Arts from Centre College in Kentucky, he returned to the state and became a founding member of the Mississippi Cultural Arts Coalition for which he has also served as Executive Director. Among the "folk" of Mississippi, he is best known for his one-man show *The Eyes of Black Folk*, an interpretation of five periods of American life in music, poetry and prose, and other historical and fictional characterizations. He is a member of the Screen Actor's Guild and has appeared in a number of film productions including *Beulah Land* and *Don't Look Back* (the Saichel Paige story).

Horhn has served as Director of the Minority Arts Program of the Mississippi Arts Commission, Director of the State Film Commission and, before assuming his current position with Tourism Development, he was Director of State and Federal Programs.

The Mississippi American Festival Project is a network of Mississippi presenters and cosponsors hosting artists' residencies designed to explore relationships between art and community and cultural celebration and empowerment.

Stories into Art

MISSISSIPPI AMERICAN FESTIVAL PROJECT

The American Festival Project is a national coalition of artists joined with a consortium of presenters and a network of community co-sponsors. The Project grew from the belief that cultural exchange, based on equality and mutual respect, can provide a context in which Americans can better understand one another in all of their diversity.

The American Festival Project was founded in 1982 by John O'Neal, then director of Free Southern Theater, and Dudley Cocke, director of Roadside Theater, as a response to a national increase in Ku Klux Klan activity. They decided to tour each other's community — one predominantly black, the other white. The following year Bob Martin and the Peoples Theater Festival brought Roadside and Free Southern together with A Traveling Jewish Theatre and El Teatro Campesino and presented the first national festival, which became a model for the project.

The American Festival coalition of artists has grown to include Roadside Theater, Junebug Theater Project, El Teatro de la Esperanza, A Traveling Jewish Theatre, Carpetbag Theater, Ruben Sierra/Seattle Group Theater, Robbie McCauley and Company, Francisco Gonzalez y su Conjunto, Liz Lerman and the Dance Exchange, and Urban Bush Women.

The American Festival in Mississippi is part of a series of festivals taking place across the country. Each festival takes on the character of its host community by involving local artists and diverse audiences. Additional festivals include Encuentro/Coming Together, a collaboration between Appalshop in Whitesburg Kentucky and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, Texas; the Urban Cultures Festival in Philadelphia sponsored by the Painted Bride Art Center in cooperation with Frankfordstyle Group Ministry, the Jaasu Ballet at Village of Arts and Humanities (Ile Ife), the Meredith School and the Taller Puertorriqueño; the Artist Teacher Partnership in Seattle, Washington, sponsored by the Seattle Group Theater; An American Festival in Ithaca, New York, sponsored by Cornell University; and an upcoming festival in Hanover, New Hampshire, sponsored by Dartmouth College. Festivals include performances, workshops, panel discussions, and collaborations with schools and community centers.



American Festival Project
Appalshop • 306 Madison Street
Whitesburg, KY. 41858 (606) 633-0108

MIZ CULCHURE LADY

by NAYO BARBARA MALCOLM WATKINS

Among those who "do the arts" in our country, there is a special breed of men and women for whom definitions as laid down by "the arts world" seem much too narrow. Many of this breed answer to titles such as arts presenter, cultural program administrator and community arts organizer. They are found throughout the country, but particularly in Mississippi and places like Mississippi where the struggle for control of the arts has not been won by commercialism, and the arts still exist as viable community vehicles. They are special because they defy titles and categories designated by those outside their communities; they do the work that is in their hearts; they create and define jobs for which we yet have no titles.

"Miz Culchure Lady" is an attempt to capture the spirit of this special breed and the nature of their work. It is a renaming of some very special people; and a reclaiming of the integral and integrated role of the arts in American communities. It is a tribute to the presenters of the Mississippi American Festival Project for whom I have no better way to describe and honor the work they do.

I've seen her everywhere. Wearing her hats, walking and talking fast, taking care of business. No doubt she is universal. And sometimes she is not a she at all, but a he of a certain nurturing, fostering, marshaling spirit. Keeper of the culture. Missionary and visionary. Making sure things are done "like they s'pose to be done." And sometimes, she is not walking at all, but in a wheelchair, or maybe sight impaired. Often she has silver hair; but she may be 21. One thing is for sure, we can always count on her. At least, the children can, for they are the objects of her attention. Even the ones who think they're grown. She is about the business of 'taking care.'

I began to take notice of Miz Culchure Lady a few years ago when I traveled the state of Mississippi providing 'technical assistance' to 'emerging arts organizations.' I'd arrive in some small town to consult with some dear soul who'd called or written my office in Jackson about the arts program she was trying to get going. Invariably, she'd tell the story. "Honey," she'd say, "we've got to get this arts program going, just got to. Cause these girls are getting pregnant every which way you turn, and the boys, they aint doing nothing but hanging out and getting mixed up with that ole dope. The trouble is, they don't know nothing 'bout who they are, their history, or nothing, cause they don't teach that in the schools no more." She was consistent, predictable and so like all the stewards of our communities we've ever known.

After awhile, I began to know I'd seen her before. All my life, I'd seen her. She was the one who'd get us kids together and rehearse and rehearse us til Mother's Day or Easter or whatever day it was, we'd stand up before the whole church and recite those little speeches and rhymes so good that our parents would nearly bust with pride. I'd seen her directing the school choir, teaching children how to plait the May pole and directing "God's Trombones." She might pinch your ear if you didn't do it right. 'Cause she said she was about "the pursuit of excellence" and you'd better be too. She had her yard planted with every kind of flower there was and if you'd go over by her house, she'd tell you the name of every bloom and make you tell them back to her.

She was the old folks who sat on the porch rocking on warm evenings and telling you the stories of everybody there ever was that was kin to you and all those that ever lived in your town too. Talkin 'bout cultural literacy, you could sure enough get a solid education from those old folks. You could tell by the invocation of their voices in the telling of the story how to place this or that particular story in your legacy of heroes or heroines. Then again, there she was in the pulpit, particularly the one at that church where people get 'happy,' that preacher who'd rolled his voice all up and down and do that rhythmic little cough, "a'ha," between the lines of his poetic oratory, telling you the stories.

She was often the girl's basketball coach and the boy's baseball or football coach making you exceed what you ever imagined your inept body could do. And that teacher whose room had every positive visual image she could find jumping off the walls at you. She made the quilt on my bed. She was my mama sculpturing the meringue of her lemon pie and telling me in a whisper with her eyes sparkling through squinted lids how you got to do it just so. That was her too that we called "strange" because she fixed up those funny teas and little cloths of leaves and told your mama how to treat you with them. Just like that was her painting pictures about our town and sometimes painting them all over the neighborhood on buildings and things, and him whittling creatures on walking canes, and those other ones who collected odd things and decorated their mantles and porches and yards with them.

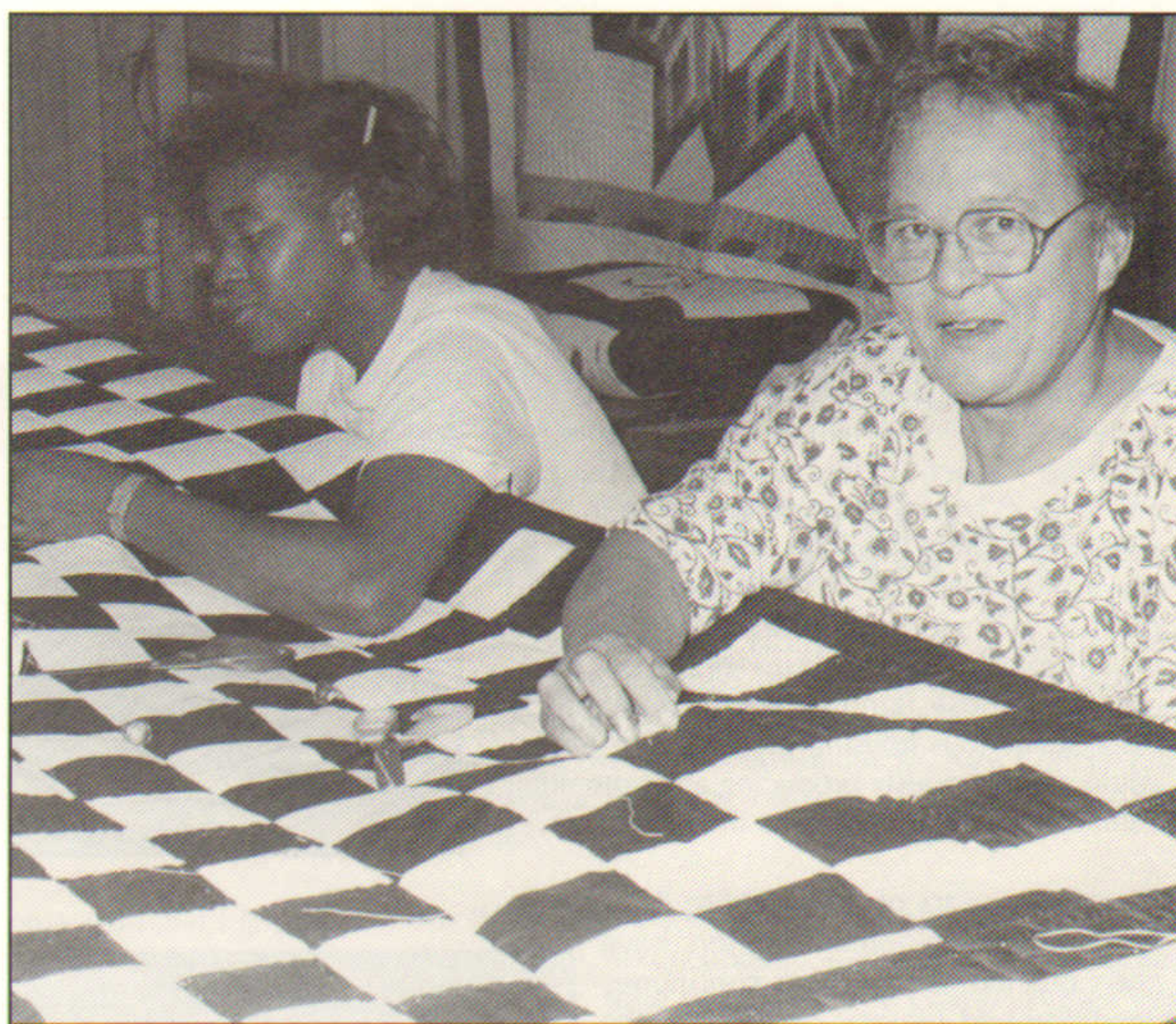
Of course, I'd seen her all my life. And in the 60's too. Oh, did she get sassy then. Wearing wraps on her head and swirls of colorful cloth around her hips. And dashikis. And afros too. Drumming on street corners. When things got tense, she'd sing a little made-up song sounded just like an old church song. Or read a poem about how we've got to "raise up" and be self-determining, and how we are from an ancient and proud people. She strutted up and down every street in this land, in Washington DC too, and those narrow roads in Alabama all the way to Montgomery. They called it a cultural movement that was hand-in-hand with the Civil Rights Movement.

The dogs didn't stop her. The seas of blues with their billy clubs and guns, no, they couldn't stop her. Then they sent the programs with government monies and gave her jobs in Headstart and Community Action. And did she do a job. She took those programs and made something out of nothing. Seldom did she do what they wanted her to do. For she was keeping the culture and minding the storehouse of traditions and wisdoms. So little by little they took back the programs. But that didn't stop her either. Evidently she is eternal. Always was and always will be. Along the Nile, she was 'taking care' there too, from the beginning.

And she is still everywhere. Today, she can often be found doing childcare while the mamas and daddy are off to the factories and mills, offices and post offices, teaching and bus driving, constructing buildings and tearing them

down, policing and soldiering, unemployment lines and welfare lines. She is taking care of the future. Sometimes she's on those jobs herself, a doctor, a teacher's aide, running some little shop. Quite often she's in the heat of things. She is there when the Mississippi catfish workers strike; she is organizing against fisherpeople getting landlocked in South Carolina; she is in the middle of political battles in Louisiana; she is a teacher and parent going up against the school board in Alabama. Occasionally, she is a name and a face on television. But mostly she is the nameless, faceless.

It is quite appropriate that she is doing "the arts" for they are always among her tools and tactics. You can find her in arts centers in the heart of inner-cities and cultural programs on the main street of one-street hamlets. Yet these are uneasy and tenuous places for her. She is confronted by funding hassles, policies and guidelines, deadlines that work against her community's timetable,



Lorraine Marks with Hystercine Rankin

Photo: Patricia Crosby

and critics who know nothing of what she is about but want to be the judge of whether she is doing "good art" or not.

Her predicament is one of justifying the holistic keeping of the culture and the functional use of art for peoples sake in an arena that understands and rewards art for arts sake. She lives under the threat of unfunding and displacement.

But that hasn't stopped her yet. She is still everywhere telling the children who they are and who it was that came before to make a way for them. It is her mission. Well, as for me, as long as she is 'taking care' and we are singing her songs, beating the drums, speaking our orations, reading our poems, painting our pictures, making meringues, planting flowers, and strutting our stuff, I will believe that somehow, no matter what they throw at us, we're gon' make it over. Yeah, we're gonna make it.

Nayo Barbara Malcolm Watkins is a poet, essayist and playwright who has contributed to the body of Southern Black Literature since the 1960's. She is also an arts organizer and consultant. She works with the American Festival Project and serves as Coordinator for the Mississippi American Festival Project.

MISSISSIPPI

Presenter Profiles

Stories into

Golden Triangle African American Cultural Society

Brickfire Project

The Golden Triangle African American Cultural Society, originally chartered in 1984 as the Afro-American Society of the Golden Triangle, is a non-profit, tax exempt organization. Before its incorporation GTAACS was an association of individuals from Starkville and Mississippi State University, concerned with education and the preservation, exposure, and enhancement of the rich contributions of the African American culture and its direct influence in the Golden Triangle area.

Through the years GTAACS has sponsored and co-sponsored many cultural and educational activities. The most expansive to date is the Brickfire Project, which has become the pen name for GTAACS activities since 1986. The name Brickfire Project was selected to represent the focus of the organization "to nurture and guide children who possess a burning desire for mainstream success, children whose families are surrounded by those ubiquitous housing projects, Red Bricks, while simultaneously producing and presenting cultural arts activities open to the entire area."

During the years of the Brickfire Project two childhood development centers have been created as well as a continuous neighborhood literacy campaign, "the Family Learning Program," designed to give entire families educational opportunities. The Brickfire Project has been deemed a model project by the Christian Children's Fund. Major funding comes from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Mississippi Arts Commission.

Brickfire has a vital arts component. It currently presents two major festivals: the Blackhills Festival and the Kwanzaa celebration. In addition to the Mississippi American Festival, Brickfire also plans a Harambee Festival and a Children's Art Festival for 1991-1992. Brickfire is a presenter of national talents such as B.B. King as well as local performing and visual artists. The Brickfire Project also includes a children's summer camp with an inter-related arts curriculum, art competitions, concerts, exhibitions, and participation in the Republic of China's International Children's Art Competition, where two awards were won.

In Brickfire Center



Brickfire festival in the park

ROCC

Rural Organizing and Cultural Center is a grassroots membership organization serving Holmes County, Mississippi, the fourth poorest county in the United States. Through community organizing, ROCC strives to bring about changes in the social-economic-political fabric of the county that address the causes of poverty and racism. While ROCC struggles to bring about systematic change at the level of decision makers, it recognizes the importance of meeting people's immediate needs, and the provision of social services is a crucial part of ROCC's activity. The ongoing development of indigenous leadership is basic to the success of ROCC's programs. Most of the salaried staff were victims of the problems that they now address, and all are Black Holmes Countians. Supported by local and long-term volunteers, the ROCC staff work in the areas of the judicial system, education, social services, and youth leadership development.

The Rural Organizing and Cultural Center is founded on the premise that community organizing and local culture should reinforce each other. Personal and collective empowerment require an awareness of one's culture and history and this ROCC has nurtured. Every year on the Saturday falling closest to the Fourth of July, ROCC celebrates Jubilee Day to commemorate the freeing of slaves in Mississippi. The event evokes not only emancipation but also the other Old Testament themes of canceling debts and redistributing land.

For the past ten years ROCC has sponsored an essay contest on "The History of Holmes County from a Black Perspective." Three years ago a poster contest was added in order to involve students of all ages.

Building on these efforts, ROCC's Holmes County History Project turns recovery of the county's local history — so often distorted and denied — into a learning process. 8th and 9th graders have been featured on national television for producing two anthologies of interviews with elderly Holmes Countians. With support from ROCC, a high school social studies class produced a 90-minute videotape on the history of Holmes County. As students organize to have this educational approach institutionalized in the school system, the Holmes County History Project will direct its efforts toward adult learners.

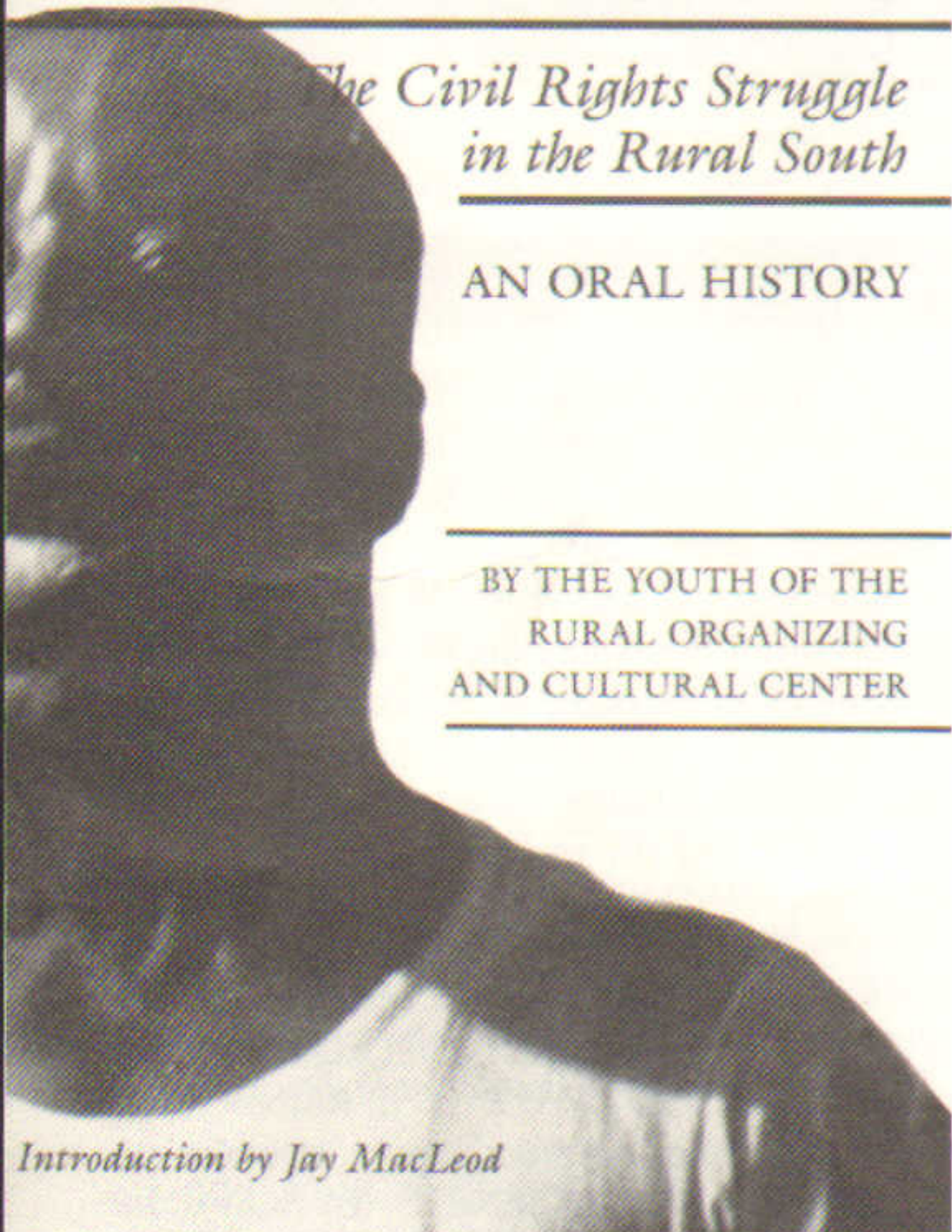
Art

MINDS STAYED ON FREEDOM

*The Civil Rights Struggle
in the Rural South*

AN ORAL HISTORY

BY THE YOUTH OF THE
RURAL ORGANIZING
AND CULTURAL CENTER



Introduction by Jay MacLeod

Mississippi Cultural Crossroads

Just down from the Courthouse, Main Street's newest and most colorful tenant quietly preserves the people's history of Claiborne County, Mississippi.

After nearly 12 years in borrowed or rented quarters, Mississippi Cultural Crossroads bought two abandoned buildings in Port Gibson that once housed a doctor's office and a department store.

Behind the quilts and children's paintings now hanging in the storefront windows sit an often-crowded quilting frame, an art studio, a darkroom, a magazine production lab and a gallery/performance space. It is here that a steady stream of artists, some local and some not, capture the people and stories of this mostly African-American community.

"History books don't tell all there is to know about a place," says Mississippi Cultural Crossroads Director Patricia Crosby. "They skim the surface, lifting out 'important' events and people, leaving behind the rich traditions and authentic voices of the ordinary people."

"These are the ingredients that provide a sense of place and community. We don't want ours to be lost." Cultural Crossroads' projects feed on each other like kudzu on trees. Stories documented in the oral history magazine *I Ain't Lying*, become raw material in Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater scripts. Tales that make young audiences giggle and gasp evoke smiles and knowing nods in older crowds. Children's portraits painted during an artist-in-the-schools residency become patches in a quilt sewn by an apprentice under the guidance of Cultural Crossroads Master Quilter Hystercine Rankin. And people and places from Rankin's childhood become applique figures in an award-winning memory quilt.

"I was sitting at my house working on a quilt and I got to thinking of picking cotton and seeing a baby on a sack," Rankin says. "And I said, 'Well, you know, I'm going to do a quilt, a story-telling quilt, with memories of my past.' I got to thinking of cutting wood and going to that spring under the hill. I could see that minister and the deacon standing on the hill when I came out of the water of Crow Creek. And I said, 'I'm going to do a quilt and I'm going to go back to what we used to do.' Everything is modern now, but this is part of the past."

Beginning October 5, the Mississippi Cultural Crossroads will present *Picturing Our Past*, an exhibit of 50 photographs selected from the more than 1,000 negatives surviving as the Allen Collection. Leigh Briscoe Allen documented a society on the brink of tremendous technological and social change. "Picturing Our Past" includes images of Mississippi agriculture, in the early 20th century, transportation, small town architecture, and the folklife and domestic life of Claiborne County.



From the exhibit *Picturing Our Past*, Photographs from the Allen Collection 1906-1915 on display at Mississippi Cultural Crossroads, fall 1991
Photo: Leigh Briscoe Allen



La Trina Holmes (mouse) being caught by Robert Hamlin (lion) in Aesop's Tale in Atella County —from a performance by Mississippi Cultural Crossroads' Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater Photo: Patricia Crosby



Northeast Mississippi Blues and Gospel Festival at Rust College
Photo: Robert Townsend Jones, Jr.

Rust College

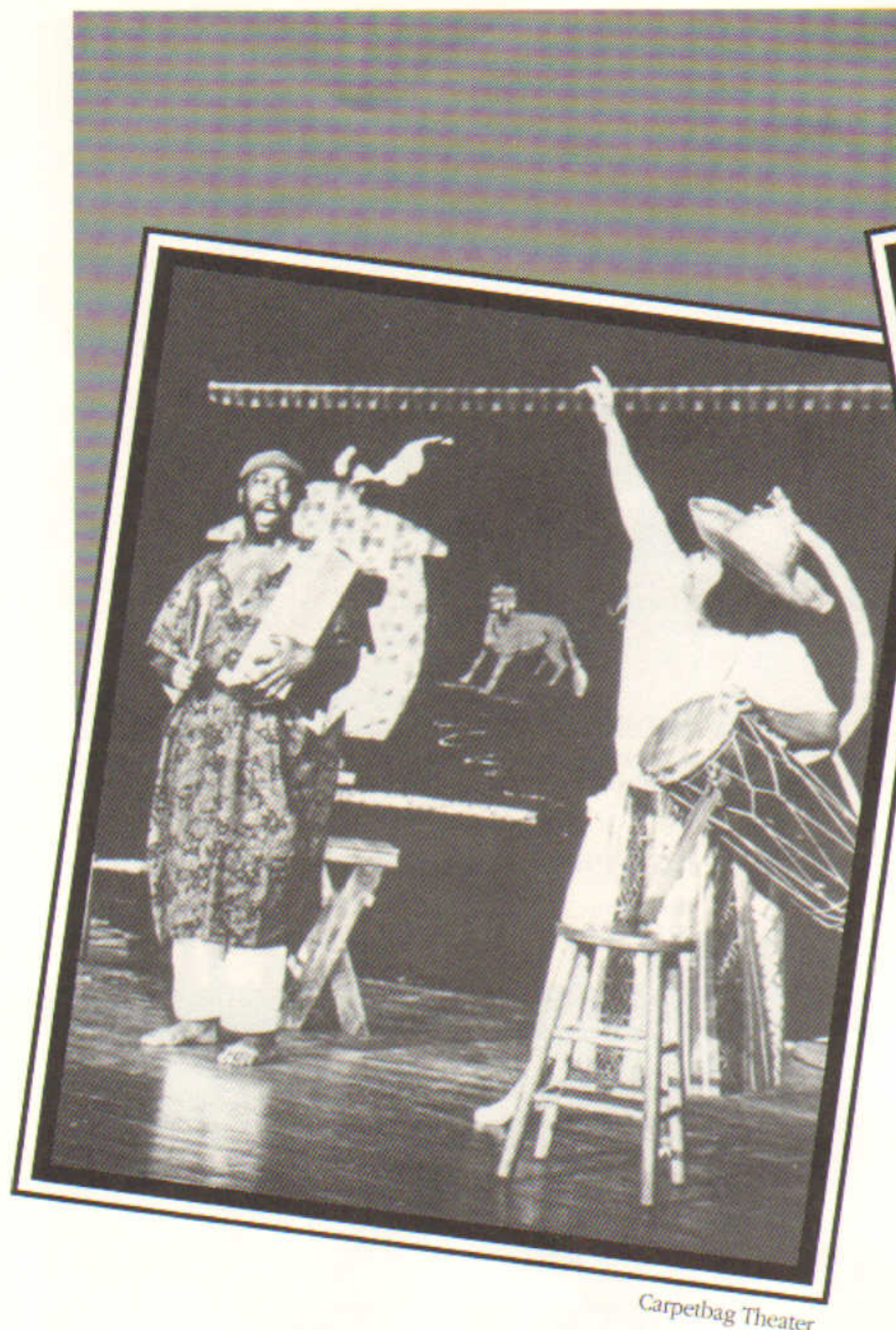
Rust College, located in Holly Springs, in rural north Mississippi, was founded in 1866. Where a one-room schoolhouse once stood on a former slave auction site, now there are twenty modern buildings. Rust College has grown from a regional college to one of national prominence.

The college's founders believed the path to freedom — social, political, and economic — could be found in the framework of a solid education. The college affirms this today, as well as the conviction that students must be armed with the skills and determination necessary to set the pace in a highly specialized society, and that students must have a heightened sense of personal and cultural responsibility to preserve their identities in the growing world community. Rust's involvement also extends into the greater community. Using satellite campuses in nearby towns, the school reaches out to nontraditional students. Through its Upward Bound program, Rust identifies and assists disadvantaged high school students through a comprehensive program to prepare them for college.

Rust College is the home of the annual Northeast Mississippi Blues and Gospel Festival. The festival features a variety of African-American musical traditions including blues, gospel, shape note hymn singing, fife and drum music, early acappella gospel and jubilee songs. Most of the musicians are traditional artists who live in the Northeast Mississippi and Mid-South region.

First organized in 1980 the festival is now in its twelfth year. It attracts over 7,000 people. The event is sponsored by Sylvester W. Oliver, Jr., an active ethnomusicologist and Chairman for the Division of Mass Communications at Rust College.

Profiles continue on page 9...



Carpetbag Theater

CARPETBAG THEATRE

The Carpetbag Theatre, Inc. (CBT) is a community based, nonprofit, professional theatre company dedicated to the production of new works. CBT's Ensemble Company, based in Knoxville, TN, develops new scripts primarily through collaboration and improvisation. Founded in 1970, CBT is a corporation of writers, artists, dancers, and musicians. It has had a notably good record of performances, workshops, and other activities and is one of the few tenured African-American professional theatre companies in the south.

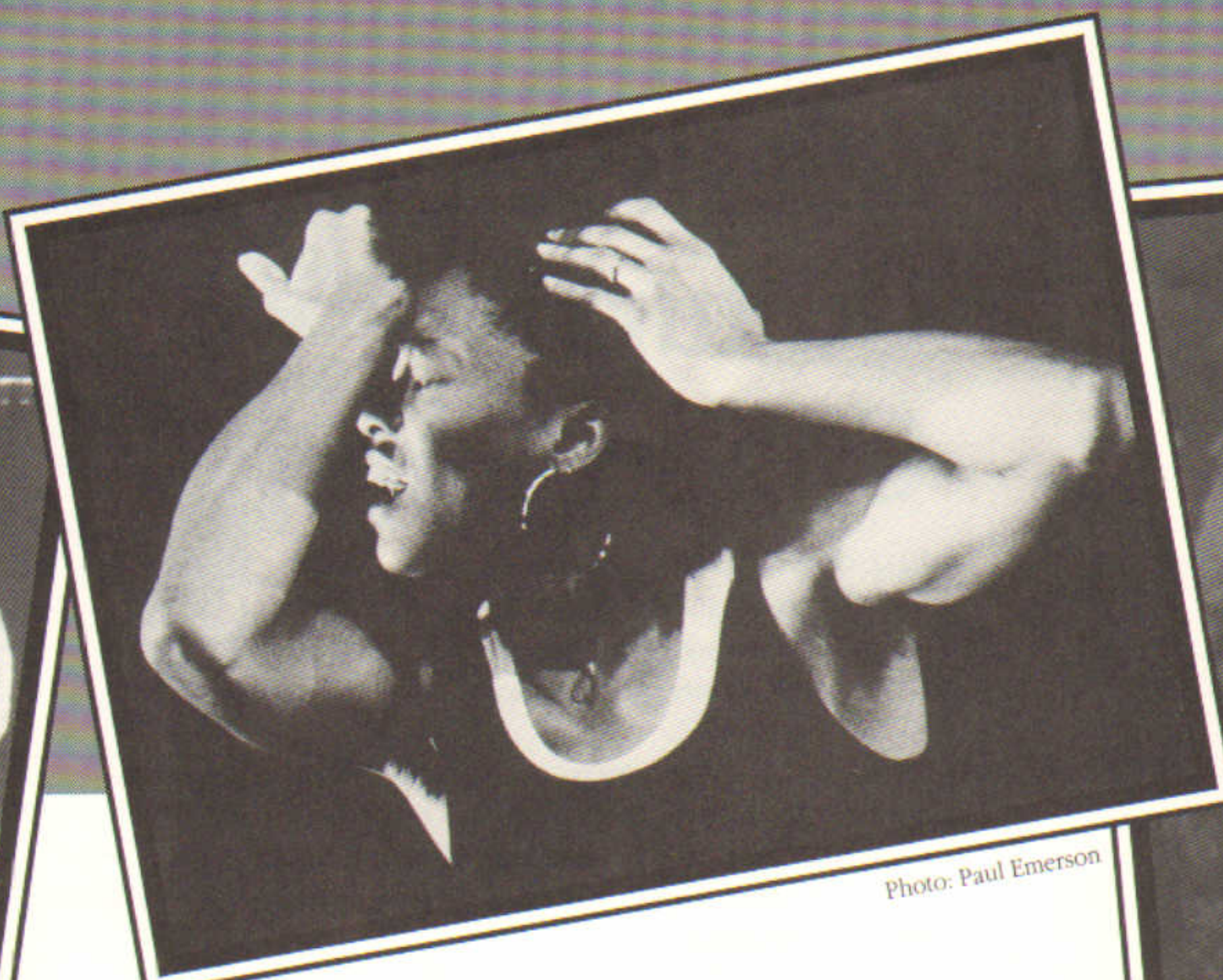
CBT's repertoire has included a spectrum of productions from full length musical and dramatic productions, to puppet shows. Its Ensemble Company has received acclaim for its original productions. The company's recent play, *RED SUMMER* tells the story of a community in Knoxville, Tennessee that could not escape the horrors of racial tensions in the summer of 1919.

CBT has actively collaborated with other theater companies to develop and produce new works. The current offering of this type is *HAVE YOU SEEN ZANDILE*. "Zandile" comes to CBT through a collaboration between Carpetbag Theatre, the playwright - Ms. Gcina Mhlophe of South Africa, The University of Tennessee Knoxville, and The Baltimore Theatre Project.

CBT has for a number of years successfully provided a needed work and training environment for area talent. In this capacity CBT has served as one of the few companies with which minority artists could receive professional work experience and training in an atmosphere in which they could compete for major roles. Several CBT students have begun successful careers in the arts in other areas of the country.

Carpetbag conducts workshops with students, senior citizens and other adults including, "Creative Approaches to the Problems of Aging," "Collaborative Writing Workshop," and "Readers Theater Workshop."

Carpetbag Theater has been the recipient of the Governor of Tennessee's Special Appreciation Award for the Arts.



Kimberli Boyd

Photo: Paul Emerson

DANCE EXCHANGE

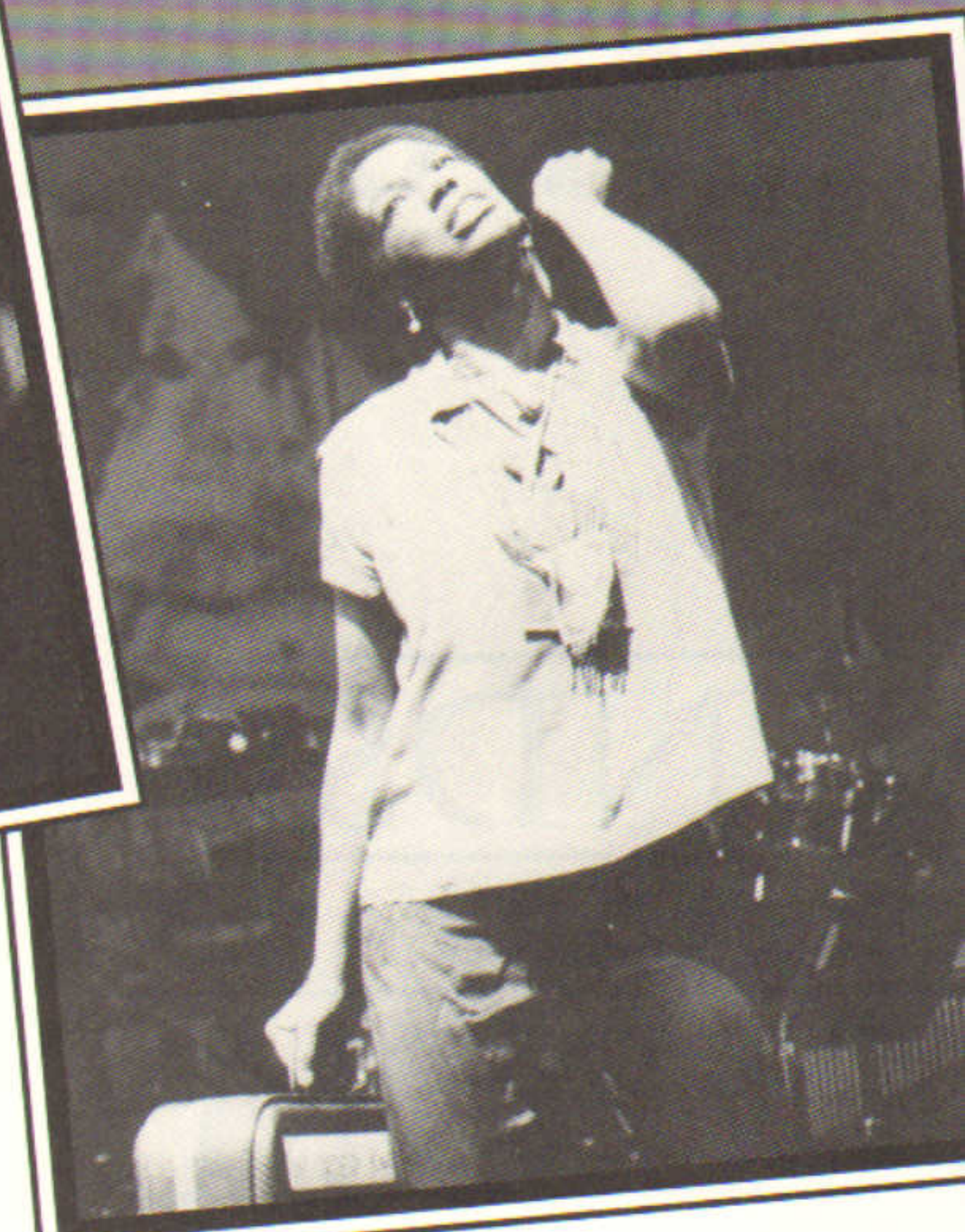
DANCE EXCHANGE was founded by Liz Lerman in 1976 as an outgrowth of her work as a dancer/choreographer and the classes she was teaching in the community. The concerns of artistic exploration and community involvement have defined the company's unique identity ever since. Dance Exchange programs include:

LIZ LERMAN DANCE EXCHANGE is an intergenerational dance company composed of professional dancers from the Washington, D.C. area which presents formal theater performances and community-based residencies. Combining dance with realistic imagery, works performed by the company are defined by the spoken word, drawing upon literature, personal experience, philosophy and political commentary. Liz Lerman Dance Exchange has been presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington Performing Arts Society, Jacob's Pillow, American Dance Festival, Serious Fun at Lincoln Center, Dance Theater Workshop, Dancing in the Streets, Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison(WIS) Civic Center, Colorado Dance Festival, EUROKAZ Festival in Yugoslavia and Dance Umbrella in London.

DANCERS OF THE THIRD AGE is a senior adult modern dance company whose members range in age from 56-94. The company, directed by Debra Caplowe, presents informal participatory performances for audiences of all ages. Sponsors include Washington Performing Arts Society's Concerts in Schools, Wolf Trap, Kennedy Center, Very Special Arts, D.C. Committee to Promote Washington, Washington Hospital Center, Johns Hopkins University, American Association of Retired Persons, Piccolo Spoleto, Smithsonian Institution's Discovery Theatre, Scensommar Festival in Sweden.

COMMUNITY CROSSOVER offers the opportunity to create dances to many groups and individuals. Class participants include senior adults, children in hospitals, people living with AIDS, prisoners, people without homes, victims of abuse, the mentally and physically challenged, and other particular populations. Community Crossover, under the direction of Kimberli Boyd, also offers teacher training workshops and consultations for dancers, activity directors, teachers, administrators, community centers and art institutions.

Dance Exchange will be celebrating its fifteenth anniversary during the 1991-92 season. Highlights will include: premieres of a new work by Liz Lerman, *THE GOOD JEW?*; a national tour; and will end with a city-wide event, 15 Days, 15 Nights: A Festival of Dance.



Robbie McCauley

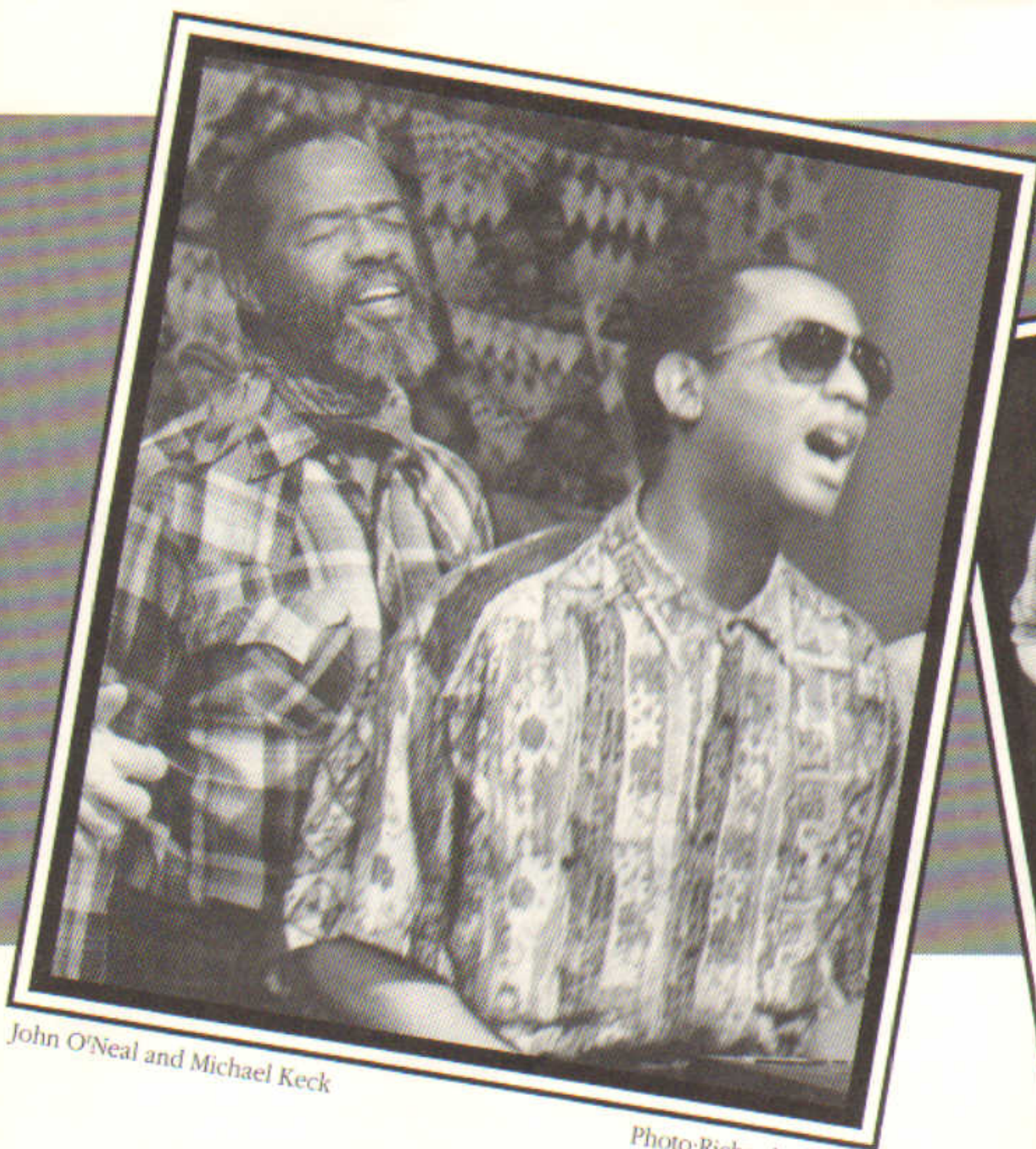
ROBBIE McCAULEY

"Many artists are recognizing more than ever that their work involves finding the means to slide back and leap ahead, blending time, in order to sniff the winds of change and report back, no matter how bitter or sweet." ROBBIE McCAULEY has articulated this vision in her theatre and performance work from the beginning of her career. Most recently, she has begun working with people of various communities throughout the United States and is very much interested in what is being done in Holmes County, Mississippi, to collect and preserve history in a way that keeps it alive.

Robbie McCauley is a veteran of New York theater, has appeared on Broadway in *FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF* and has created roles off-Broadway in several plays including *THE TAKING OF MISS JANIE* by Ed Bullins, for which she received an Audelco award; *CITIES IN BEZIQUE* and *A MOVIE STAR HAS TO STAR IN BLACK AND WHITE* by Adrienne Kennedy; *LADIES IN WAITING* by Peter DeAnda; and was part of the Obie-Award-winning company that created *TOURISTS AND REFUGEES II* with Joseph Chaiken. With Chaiken, she also participated for three years in the Winter Project and created *SOLO VOYAGES*, a theater work in which three Adrienne Kennedy pieces were put together.

In 1979, with composer Ed Montgomery, she began to create musical theater performances which were done at community theaters and performance spaces in and around New York City. *THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO THOSE WHO'VE HAD TO LIVE IT* played at the University of the Streets, Folk City, S.N.A.F.U., The People's Voice Cafe, Hampshire College in Massachusetts, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, and back at La Mama in New York. They also performed with longtime performing artist Bob Carroll in his *DIRT SHOW*. Their most recent work, *CONGO NEW YORK*, was developed with a New Works grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities and presented at Great Woods, Massachusetts, and at the Maine Arts Festival.

An innovator in the use of content as aesthetic in performance, McCauley in the mid-eighties began to develop a series of autobiographical works based on historical events. These works include *MY FATHER AND THE WARS*, *INDIAN BLOOD* and *SALLY'S RAPE*; she received a 1990 Bessie award for the latter.



John O'Neal and Michael Keck

Photo: Richard Russell

JUNEBUG PRODUCTIONS

Junebug Productions, (JPI), is the organizational successor to the Free Southern Theater, which was founded in 1963 as an instrument of the Civil Rights Movement. The mission of Junebug Productions is to develop and present theater and other forms of cultural expression which support and encourage the ongoing efforts of the great mass of African American people in the Black Belt south to improve the quality and character of their lives and to work with others to end oppression and exploitation everywhere. To fulfill this mission Junebug Productions runs three programs: the Junebug Theater Project, a Community Arts Program in New Orleans, and Special Projects.

The Junebug Theater Project produces and tours theater work. The current repertory is comprised of three original plays and a new collaboration with the Roadside Theater. Soon slated for completion is a new collaboration with A Traveling Jewish Theatre. Another original play featuring actor/musician Michael Keck is also in development.

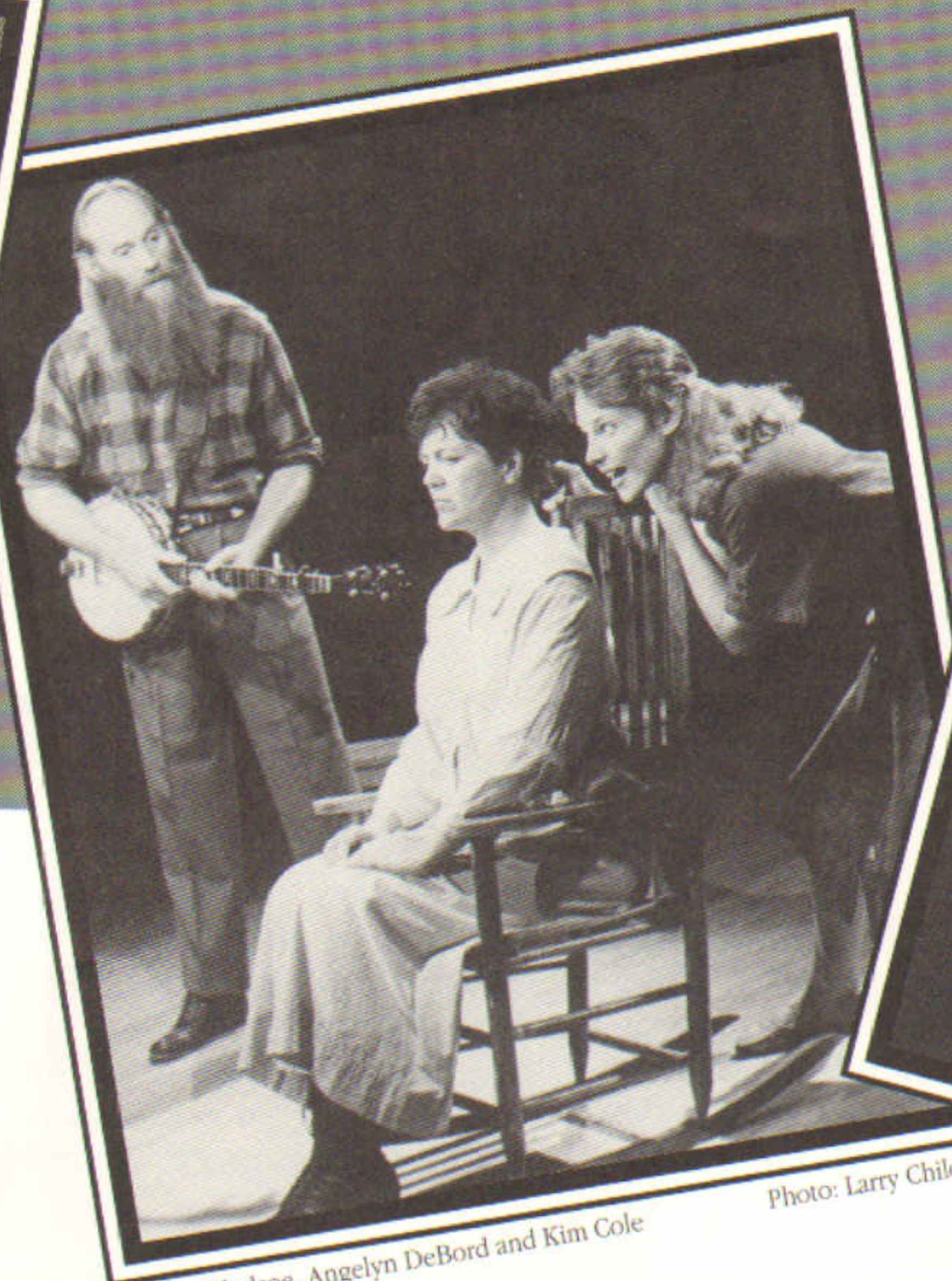
Under Special Projects the main activity of JPI is its participation in the American Festival Project. This year Junebug will participate in Festivals in Mississippi, and at Dartmouth College. With the Urban Bush Women, JPI has plans to produce An American Festival in New Orleans in the 1993-94 season. That festival will draw a theme from the continuing impact of slavery and its legacy in our area.

The New Orleans Program presents a variety of cultural events in New Orleans and mobilizes families, community organizations and institutions, and individuals to collect and tell their own stories and to share these stories with each other.

JUNEBUG JABBO JONES — THE CHARACTER

Junebug is a folk character who grew out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. Members of the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee, (SNCC), created the character to stand as a symbol of the wisdom of common people. Whenever someone summed up experience in some unique way or when wit was used to prevail over power, the event was cited as an example of how Junebug gets things done.

Junebug is similar to the African Praisesingers or Griots who serve as custodians of local and regional history. Drawn from the rich and varied tradition of African American oral literature, Junebug has a lot in common with the anonymous authors of Shine, Stagolee, the Signifying Monkey, Anansi the Spider, Brother Rabbit, and other heroes from traditional oral literature. True to his mentors, Junebug weaves his observations into rich, revealing scenes, stories, rhymes, and songs.



Tommy Bledsoe, Angelyn DeBord and Kim Cole

Photo: Larry Childress

ROADSIDE THEATER

And we believed in the family
And the Old Regular Baptist Church.
We believed in John L. for a while
'Til things couldn't get much worse.

Oh, they tell me times were harder then
And I remember that for a while.
But I remember the way my Daddy laughed
And the way my Mama smiled.

—Song Chorus from Roadside's
SOUTH OF THE MOUNTAIN
by Ron Short

Roadside Theater's home is in the central Appalachian coalfields of east Kentucky and southwest Virginia. Roadside's members, most all natives of the region, have called on their heritage of storytelling, music, and the mountain church to develop a theatrical form which combines a natural storytelling style with acting and music. This style allows Roadside to speak to its audience in a forthright and intimate manner. Roadside's plays are influenced by the body of archetypal tales, oral histories, and ballads that are a special part of the Appalachian tradition. Smithsonian Magazine has described this content and style as "dramaturgy with a difference; a hybrid form of play-acting as organic to this hardbitten coal country as the Cumberland walnut; an Appalachian oral history carefully crafted into down-home docudrama."

Roadside is an ensemble company of 12 artists and administrators. Over the past 15 years, the theater has created 14 original plays, trained dozens of performers, writers, and directors, and toured seven of its original productions to a variety of audiences in more than 700 communities in 39 states and Europe. The company has performed a number of times off-Broadway in New York City, at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C., and has represented the United States at international theater festivals in Los Angeles, Seattle, Philadelphia, Sweden, Denmark, and London.

Roadside is a part of Appalshop, the Appalachian media arts center, and is a founding member of Alternate ROOTS, the Alliance for Cultural Democracy, and the American Festival project.



Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Photo: Cylla Von Tiedemann

URBAN BUSH WOMEN

Urban Bush Women was established in 1984 by Artistic Director Jawole Willa Jo Zollar to realize a creative vision continuously enriched by the folklore and religious traditions of Africans throughout the diaspora. Through movement, live music, and a capella vocalizations based on field hollers and chants, Urban Bush Women explores a people's transformation of suffering into the bittersweet joy of survival. The sense of community which is the basis of the company's artistic vision and working process grows to encompass the diverse audiences for its work.

Urban Bush Women has presented major seasons in New York, first at the Ethnic Folk Arts Center and then at Clark Center for the Performing Arts, La Mama, Serious Fun! at Lincoln Center, The Kitchen, and Aaron Davis Hall. The company has toured widely in the United States, including appearances at Festival 2000, the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., Walker Art Center, and the National Black Arts Festival, as well as residencies in Boston, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Austin, and Albuquerque under the auspices of the National Performance Network. Internationally, the company has toured England twice under the auspices of the Dance Umbrella Festival, throughout Germany, to Amsterdam, to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv for the Israel Festival, and to France for Montpellier Danse '88 (subsidized by The Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals).

Urban Bush Women's full-evening work, PRAISE HOUSE, was co-commissioned during the 1989-90 season by a consortium of presenters: the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., the Walker Art Center, the Washington Performing Arts Society, the American Music Theater Festival, and the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. It toured widely throughout the United States before its presentation at the 1991 Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival. A version of PRAISE HOUSE was aired on public television's "Alive From Off-Center" during the summer of 1991.

Urban Bush Women is developing a new model for community engagement of performing arts touring companies. The goal is to assist in the cultivation of a grass roots led process through which a community's popular culture traditions, especially dance and music, will be allowed to grow in greater harmony with already established plans for community-based neighborhood development and empowerment.

Mississippi/Culture/The Arts:

A View From Tou

by JERRY W. WARD, JR.

One of the especially bright moments of my undergraduate career at Tougaloo College was the opportunity to meet Doris Derby, Gilbert Moses, and John O'Neal when the Free Southern Theater was still like *Jes Grew* in search of its text: an idea and a spirit seeking embodiment. For an impressionable student from the Gulf Coast, getting to know these three civil rights workers was itself a liberal education. Doris was all New York and sophistication with a boundless generosity that was touching; John, lean, learned in philosophy and possessed of a genuine gift for acting, enlightened our nights as we prepared to mount *Inherit the Wind*, Gil, whom I remember as combative, cocksure, and well informed about everything, taught us by indirection the necessity of verbally lynching one's enemies. Meeting with the three of them and Bill Hutchinson, our drama director, to discuss the possibility of using drama to promote the aims of the Civil Rights Movement was rather like being a neophyte at a meeting of the elders. I sat in awe of their knowledge and daring, greatly admiring their wanting to bring the shock of cultural recognition to Mississippi and the South. In retrospect, I take great pride in the knowledge that Tougaloo College was the birthplace of the legendary Free Southern Theater.

Although Tougaloo College played no role in the founding of the American Festival Project, my alma mater certainly has historical and ideological affinities with the aims of AFP. Since 1869, Tougaloo has been an oasis of freedom and social experiment in the Mississippi desert of racism and anti-intellectualism, a fertile site for cultural aspirations. Like AFP, the college recognizes the need for multiple voices and cross-fertilization of ideas in Mississippi. It holds fast to a tradition of commitment in helping people improve their lives. The college is an agent of culture.

I do not have in mind the thin idea of culture that seems to be dying a slow and painful death among elitists, but the blooming of culture represented in Anne Moody's autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi* and Joyce Ladner's seminal study, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman*. Those women, who were the comrades in struggle of Derby, Moses, and O'Neal, were my classmates.

Thus, to learn that the Mississippi AFP would begin in Fall

1991 and that John O'Neal had played a role in conceptualizing this socially responsible project to promote change and creativity between performing artists and American communities was indeed good news. It is well-known that racial politics have worsened in Mississippi, despite the veneer of interracial cooperation; that some artistic efforts in Mississippi's smaller

make what they do naturally pay off, and to improve the social and political climate for the arts. It is a chance for AFP artistic companies and performers to work for audiences that may have more than a desire to be entertained and to gain something valuable from communal lore. We have the possibility of reaffirming and heightening the links between life and representation. The

Mississippi AFP and citizens of the state can make something remarkable happen in the long run. They can give Tougaloo College a reason, once again, for being supportive of a project that tests theory of culture against the real dynamics of change and cultural creation.

What we have long known about culture and the arts in Mississippi is that both exist in a realm of confusion, that the meanings assigned to culture and the arts fluctuate to points of diminishing returns.

In this sense, Mississippi is like the rest of America where culture is seldom understood in its productive and holistic sense, instead, the term culture is appropriated by power brokers. They have an interest in maintaining Eurocentric myths about culture and the arts. The real mythmakers—people spinning bodacious lies in such places as Belzoni, Tchula, and Yazoo City—need not apply. Bach, ballet, and William Grant Still are culture, but B.B. King ain't. The narrow definition of culture can not accommodate the multiple forms of which culture is composed. And even

when such brokers do recognize profound artistry and culture in everyday life (a subject Alice Walker explores brilliantly in her classic essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens"), they hastily commodify it as folk art.

Ironically, so distant guardians of culture contribute to the grounds for singing the blues. Or why has not one blues artist received an award from the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters? The blues, an aural history of a people's culture, has certainly been authenticated as a superb art form by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Perhaps the Mississippi AFP can succeed in exposing the contradictions between "official" and "common sense" ideas about culture and the arts, contradictions that are at base political and economic. Out of such dialectic, one hopes, will come a lasting sense that community artists and organizations do authenticate their own cultural expressions and validate the arts as lifeforces before they are "discovered." Perhaps the vibrant dreams



John O'Neal as Junebug Jabbo Jones

Photo: Agnaldo S. Maciel

communities are thwarted by lack of belief, money and technical resources, that the fine record of political success among blacks in the state overshadows the ongoing problems of having the world recognize what DuBois aptly called the gifts of black folk. In Mississippi, artists in black communities have not yet exploited the vital center of their fabulous talents; their talents have been exploited by others.

So, O'Neal's return in the guise of Pike County's Junebug, bringing along Roadside and Carpetbag Theaters, Robbie McCauley, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, and Urban Bush Women, is good news indeed. Such intervention seems right as we deal with representation (political redistricting) and mimesis (the tragic drama of crack even in rural communities). The Mississippi AFP is an exciting opportunity for community organizations and citizens in Holly Springs, Lexington, Starkville, and Port Gibson to activate the latent power of their minds and hands, to

galoo

that seem to inform all the American aesthetics save the institutionalized aesthetic of the deathstream will be realized in the collaborations at the four sites. Nevertheless, it may be most important that Mississippi artists and organizations gain new expertise in using culture and the arts to improve the material conditions of their lives.

As the Mississippi AFP unfolds, we expect no miracles, no sudden renaissance of talent as is the case with younger jazz musicians in New Orleans or with Take Six out of Alabama. We do not expect more recognition that drama as a reflection of life and as for sorting out some of life's problems and possibilities doesn't always happen on the stage. We expect new understanding of the function of



The Mansion (1948), Tougaloo College

Photo Courtesy Tougaloo College

Hollis Watkins

Community activist, songwriter and cultural worker, Hollis Watkins has been using song as an organizing and teaching tool since the days when Tougaloo College was a "haven" for Civil Rights workers of the 60's, and he was a student there. Today he is a political analyst and consultant working with programs such as the Mississippi Action for Community (MACE) Training and Technical Assistance Program for black elected and appointed officials. As a part of the Mississippi American Festival Project, he will conduct workshops to help young people gain understanding of Civil Rights history through the freedom songs of the period, and create new songs reflecting the topics of their world today.



Tougaloo College is a private, co-educational, historically black, church-related, four-year, liberal arts institution located just north of the city of Jackson, Mississippi. Founded in 1869 by the American Missionary Association, Tougaloo was chartered on the principle that it "be accessible to all irrespective of their religious tenets, and conducted on the most liberal principles for the benefit of our citizens in general." Tougaloo retains and respects its traditions, remains dedicated to the equality of all people, and continues to be a value-centered community where students apply current knowledge and prepare for lifelong education related to new information and technologies, as well as humane standards in a changing world. Tougaloo admits to its educational program students with diverse backgrounds and preparations in order to enable them to understand and appreciate the scientific, cultural, and spiritual achievements of men and women so as to be effective citizens in a democracy.

Tougaloo offers an undergraduate curriculum designed to encourage students to apply critical thought to all areas of life; to acquire a basic knowledge of the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences; to develop entry-level skills required in selected professions, and to provide leadership in a democratic society. Tougaloo intends that its students become self-directed learners and self-reliant persons capable of dealing effectively with people, challenges, and issues both now and in the future.

In 1989, Tougaloo's eleventh president, Adib A. Shakir, launched a renewal process for the college guided by theme of his inauguration, "Tougaloo Renaissance: Reflecting, Renewing, Rededicating." The years 1991-1992 constitute the third and fourth years of the Tougaloo Renaissance.

dance as re/creation to emerge. We expect cross-cultural insights about how music documents and empowers. We look forward to witnessing how multimedia presentations release the verbal and visual potentials in what Richard Wright named the Forms of Things Unknown.

These expectations, of course, are based on the always present need for culture to articulate itself in transformations. Being given to a certain literal-mindedness at times, we Mississippians expect the AFP to develop "cultural exchanges based on cultural grounding which join diverse people in a common pursuit of cultural and social justice." The discussions which are essential to such a process can get diverse people within a single community to celebrate and profit from the reintegration of art and ethos. The common pursuit of justice begins with clearing a space for positive knowledge of our heritage, ourselves as beings in the world, and our innate strengths. A space for knowing why endless struggle does have its moments of triumph.

Often we black Mississippians are so busy with the making of culture and the arts that we can't see the beauty and power of what we have produced, or take full advantage

of our production. The Mississippi AFP has a catalytic function. A Tougaloo student, Margaret Holman, spoke for many Mississippians when she said "for once I want to read a literary work by someone who knows my frustrations and my cultural triumphs." Ann Brown of the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center in Lexington spoke for many other Mississippians at a meeting this summer when she mentioned community people in Holmes County had already written about themselves; now they want to see themselves. And as one engaged in the cultural process of reflecting, rededicating, and renewing at Tougaloo College, I agree with John O'Neal's proposition that "art is to the struggle for understanding among the people as a weapon is to warfare." In that sense, all of us involved with the Mississippi American Festival Project have to deal with an item in the reality thinking of Junebug Jabbo Jones. "You can't hardly tell whether a gun's a good thing or a bad thing till you find out who's got the damn thing and who they got it pointed at!"

Jerry W. Ward, Jr. is the Lawrence Durgin Professor of Literature at Tougaloo College.

MISSISSIPPI Presenter Profiles

Continued from page 5

Potpourri Artistic Repertory Theater

Potpourri Artistic Repertory Theater (PART) had its debut as a community theater in 1982 with THE AMEN CORNER directed by its founder Samerrah Muhammad.

As the city of Jackson buzzed about the "standing room only" performances, the final night of the production was blessed with the presence of the playwright James Baldwin in the audience. In the true sense of community theater, the audience of young and old, college presidents and welfare mothers, artists and non-artists thrilled to the dynamic the internationally celebrated visitor added to an already wonderful theater experience. That evening launched the theater to a great start from which it has since flourished.

PART has provided unique opportunities for theater professionals to come together with community artists to create and produce African American classics as well as new and experimental works based upon African and American art forms, and present them to broad-based and diverse audiences. Among its credits are productions of Lonnie Elder's CEREMONIES AND DARK OLD MEN; MOJO by Alice Childress; award winning playwright August Wilson's MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM; and POETRY FOR LOVERS by Jackson's own Rhyia Hope Crozier. PART has also presented readings by Robert Earl Jones and performances by jazz great Pharoah Sanders and local comedian Veronica Cooper.

Located in the capital city of Jackson, PART seeks to serve the diversity of artists, potential artists and audiences of Mississippi's urban center through traditional and non-traditional programming. It has presented improvisational theater. Potpourri Educational Theater (PET) was created to offer communication skills, expression, creative movement and writing to young people ages 3-18. Potpourri also offers workshops, lectures, demonstrations, writing and acting classes for adults.

Residencies by American Festival artists, Robbie McCauley and Carpetbag Theater will add still another dimension to Potpourri's work. Both residencies will offer workshops for artists using community stories, life experience and oral histories as the materials for theatrical creation and expression. Performances for general audiences will also be presented.

Potpourri Theatre Director Samerrah Muhammad



Community group meeting at Smith Robertson



Potpourri Theater's cast of Ma Rainey's BLACK BOTTOM

Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center

Located in the heart of Jackson's historic Farish Street District, the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center is named in honor of a black community leader who served Jackson as an alderman from 1893-1899. The Museum and Center occupy the site of Jackson's first public school building for African Americans. Smith Robertson, who was born a slave in Lafayette, Alabama in 1840, urged the city to establish the school in 1894. Writer Richard Wright was among the many students who passed through the school's portals during its 76 years of service.

Today Smith Robertson is a comprehensive depository of artifacts portraying the African American Mississippian's experience in history, art, music, and literature. Dr. Jessie Mosley spearheaded the petitioning of the City of Jackson by concerned citizens to stop demolition of the school in 1977. As Executive Director since its opening in 1984, she has guided the development of a program of exhibitions, demonstrations, celebrations, festivals, workshops, forums, and a gift shop. Community groups enjoy the atmosphere of Smith Robertson



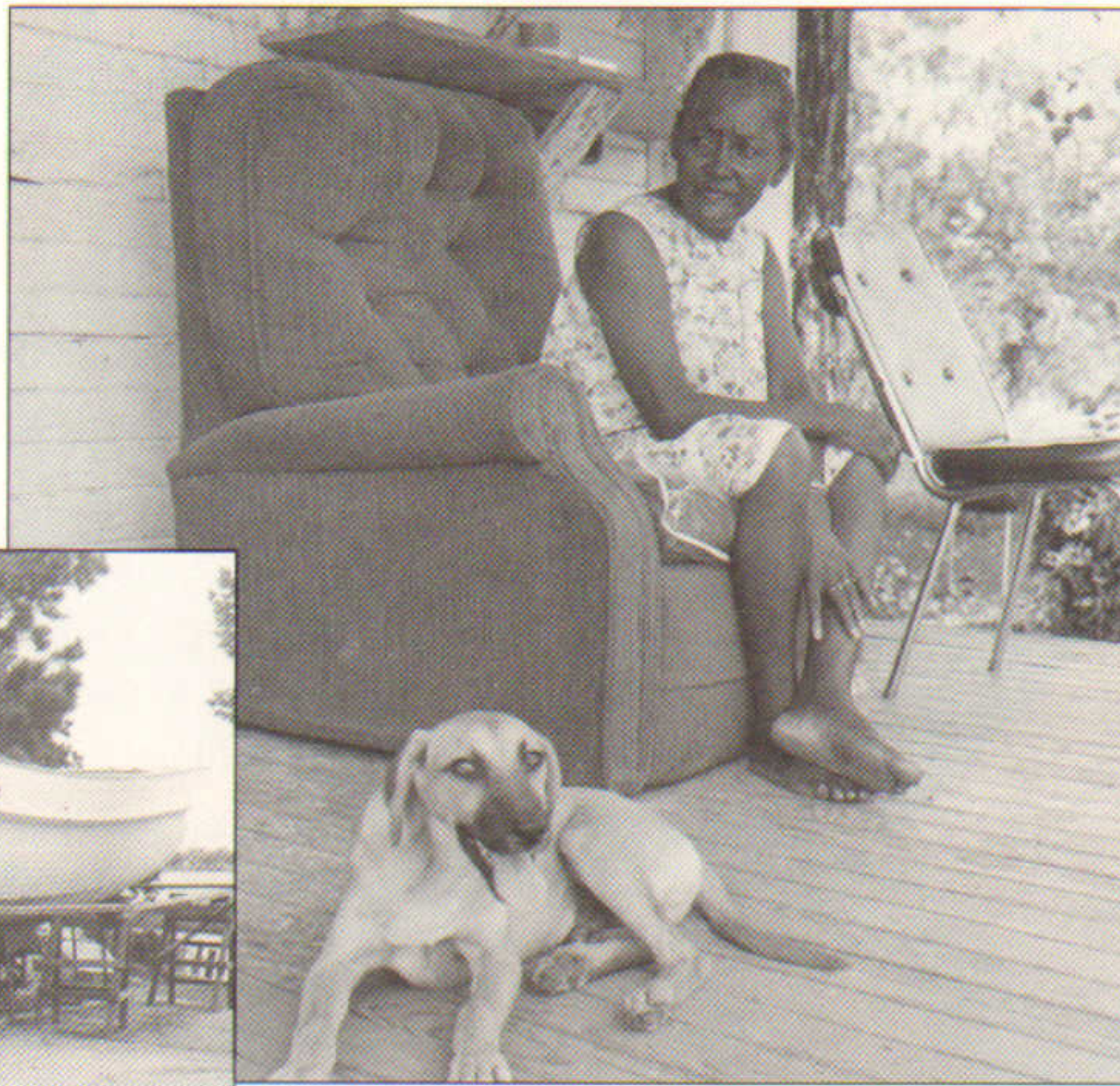
Docent Anita Scott at Smith Robertson with school group.

for their meetings, programs and productions, and families and other groups find its walls of history and culture a likely place for their reunions. Schools in Jackson and across the state bring their students to Smith Robertson on field trips.

Tom Rankin

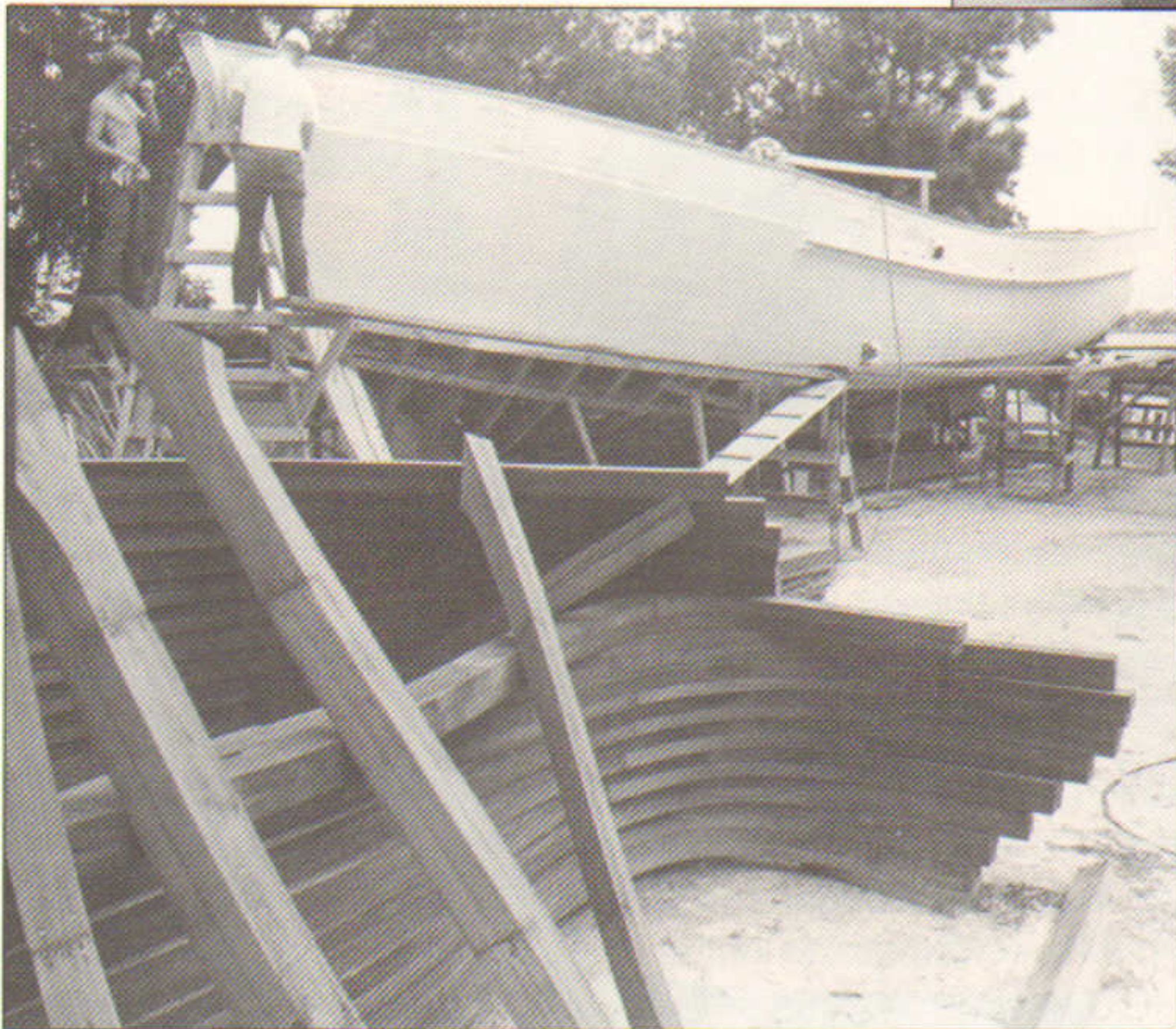
Tom Rankin is Chairman and Assistant Professor of Art and Photography at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi. A filmmaker, folklorist, and photographer, Rankin has been documenting and interpreting the folk culture of the South for over ten years.

Educated at Tufts University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Georgia State University, he has published numerous articles and reviews on photography and southern culture. He co-produced two LP record albums, *"Great Big Yam Potatoes": Anglo-American Fiddle Music from Mississippi* and *Free Hill: A Sound Portrait of a Rural Afro-American Community*. With Barry Dornfeld and Jeff Titon he is co-director and co-producer of the film "Powerhouse for God". His photographs have been published in numerous magazines, journals and books, and he has exhibited throughout the country, including shows in Atlanta, San Francisco, and New York. Currently he is working on a book about sacred space and sacred life in the Afro-American communities of the Mississippi Delta. In 1991 he was awarded the Susan B. Herron fellowship in the visual arts from the Mississippi Arts Commission.



Bolivar Landing, Mississippi, 1990

Photo: Tom Rankin



Boat builders, Biloxi, Mississippi

Photo: Tom Rankin



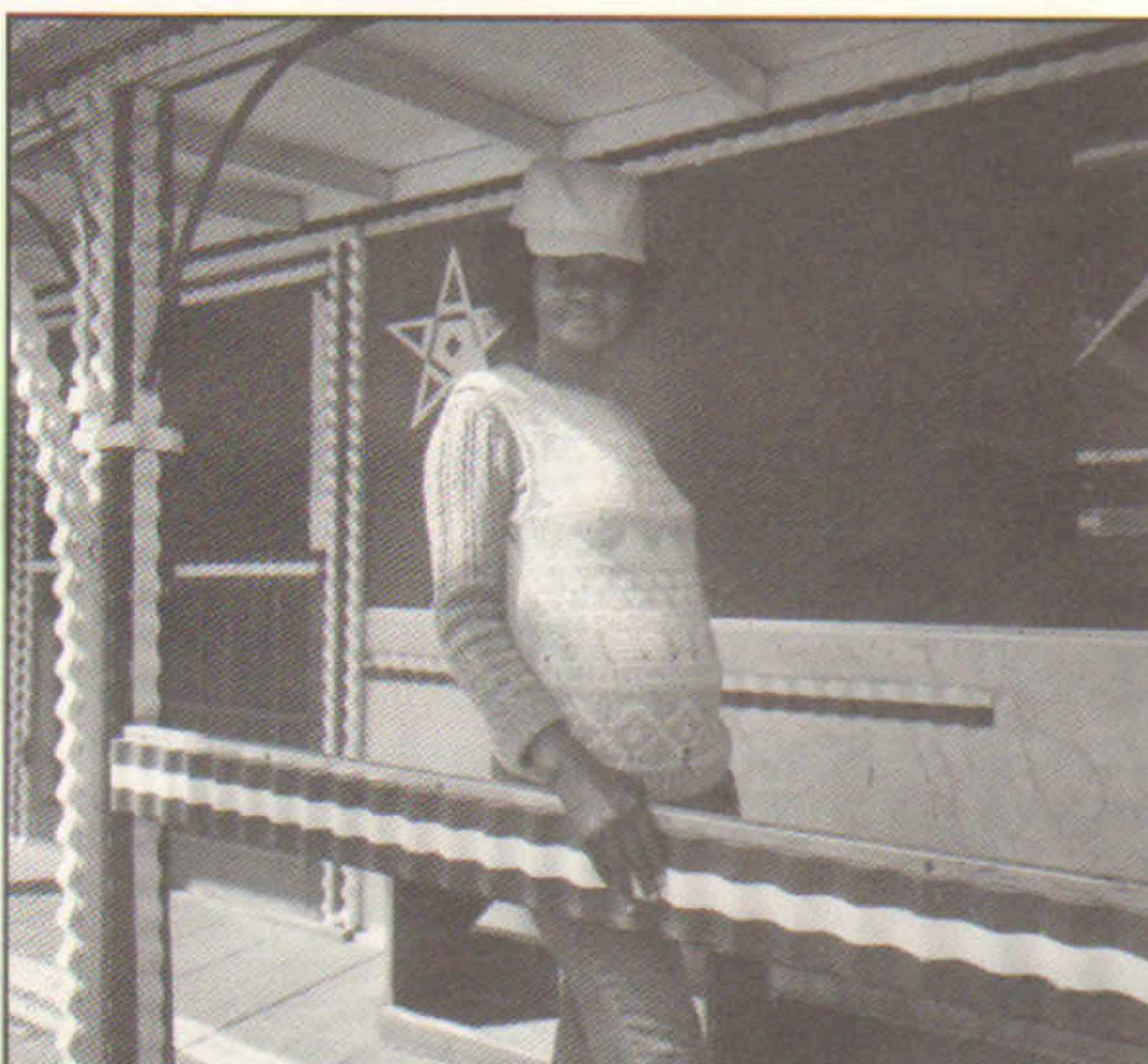
Charley Patton's descendants at dedication of monument where Patton is buried, Holly Ridge, MS, July 1991
Photo: Tom Rankin



Baptism, Mound Bayou, MS 1990 from Tom Rankin's exhibit "Sacred Spaces" which is touring MS the spring of 1992
Photo: Tom Rankin

Exhibit Revealing Visions: Six African American Mississippi Artists

The Wright State Art Center and the Department of Art at Delta State University will present an invitational exhibition of African American Mississippi artists during February and March of 1992. "Revealing Visions: Six African American Mississippi Artists" will feature well-known Mississippi folk artists as well as several academy trained artists. Their work will be accompanied by historic, aesthetic, and biographical information about each artist. The six artists include: Mary T. Smith, Hazelhurst, MS; Luther Willis, Crystal Springs, MS; Carolyn Morris, Cleveland, MS; Bobby Whalen, Indianola, MS; Thomas Eloby, Clarksdale, MS; and J.W. McCoy, Shelby, MS.



Woman at Margaret's Market, Vicksburg, MS, 1989

Photo: Tom Rankin

Delta State University

Delta State University is a public institution located in Cleveland, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Created as Delta State Teachers College by Senate Bill 263, it opened for its first regular session on September 15, 1925. The growth and expanding function of the institution were evidenced by its name change in 1955 to Delta College and in 1974 to Delta State University. Delta State is committed to providing educational and cultural experiences designed to enhance and fulfill the potential of all persons without regard to race, religion, national origin, sex, or age. At the heart of the curriculum Delta State provides an undergraduate education in arts and sciences, business, education, and nursing. The university also offers graduate study in education and business, continuing education programs in a variety of areas, and a comprehensive student affairs program.

Stories into Art

MISSISSIPPI AMERICAN FESTIVAL PROJECT

SCHEDULE FALL '91 EVENTS

September 27 - October 2: Brickfire Project of Starkville will host Junebug Theater Project and Roadside Theater in residence for the 7th annual Blackhills Arts Festival. Performances of "Junebug Jack" on the 30th and 1st at Greensboro Center. Workshops and other activities. For information call (601)323-5321.

October 28: "Minds Stayed on Freedom", the recent publication of the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center (ROCC) of Lexington will be the springboard for "Stories Into Art: Oral Narrative, History, Literature and Artistic Reflection", a humanities program at ROCC at 7pm. Participants will include student interviewers and community people who were interviewed for the book, scholars in history and literature, teachers, cultural workers, and artists including local and American Festival artists. Robbie McCauley, Urban Bush Women and Hollis Watkins who will conduct theater, dance and song residencies in Holmes County will be among the artists. Dr. Jerry Ward and Dr. Charles Sallis will serve as humanists. For information call Ann Brown at 601/834-3080.

October 28- November 2: Junebug Theater Project and Roadside Theater will be in residence at Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson. They will conduct workshops in Port Gibson public schools, with Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater, and with an emerging community theater group. A public performances of the Junebug/Roadside production JUNEBUG JACK will take place Nov. 2nd at 7pm. For information call 601/437-8905.

November 17-19: Robbie McCauley will begin her residency with Potpourri Theater and Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center in Jackson.

November 20-25: Robbie McCauley will begin her residency with ROCC.

SCHEDULE WINTER/ SPRING '92 EVENTS

February/March: Robbie McCauley will continue her Mississippi residency in three sites:

- Showing of ROCC theater work-in-progress by McCauley and Holmes County participants from workshop collaboration.
- Lecture and performance at Delta State University in Cleveland in conjunction with "Revealing Visions: Six African American Mississippi Artists", an exhibition curated and presented by DSU's Art Department. For information call Tom Rankin, 601/846-4721.
- Ongoing collaboration with Potpourri in Jackson including a workshop for actors using the technique of personal experiences as a resource for performance.

February 21-29: The Dance Exchange in residence (workshops and public performance) at two sites:

- February 21-23: Brickfire Project, Starkville.
- February 24-29: Mississippi Cultural Crossroads, Port Gibson.

March 3-20: Carpetbag Theater in residence (workshops, lec/dems, and performances) at three sites:

- March 3-7: Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson .
- March 11-15: Potpourri Theater at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center in Jackson.
- March 18-20: Brickfire Project in Starkville.

March 5-8: Rust College will host a residency with Urban Bush Women. Dance and music workshops. A musical "jam" with local string and percussion musicians. Public performance. For information call Sylvester Oliver at 601/252-4661.

March: The Tougaloo College Humanities Festival will bring together artists and presenters of the Mississippi American Festival Project with humanities scholars in three days of speakers, panel discussions and performances. For more information call Dr. Jerry Ward or Dr. Elise White at 601/977-7700. Tougaloo will also host the project's evaluation meeting.

April: Dance Exchange will be in residence at Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson. Workshops for community theater exploring inter-racial and intergenerational collaboration and creation. Informal performance by visiting and community artists.

April: Residency by Urban Bush Women at ROCC in Lexington. The collaboration will explore the common interest of both the artists and the presenter in community organizing by employing dance and movement to create empowering and educational experiences for young people.



PRESENTERS

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Delta State University Cleveland, MS 38733 (601) 846-4721	Rust College Music Dept. Holly Springs, MS 38634 (601) 252-4661
Mississippi Cultural Crossroads Box 89 ASU Lorman MS 39096 (601) 437-8905	Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center 528 Bloom Street PO Box 3259 Jackson, MS 39207 (601) 960-1457
Rural Organizing and Cultural Center (ROCC) 103 Swinney Lane Lexington, MS 39095 (601) 834-3080	Tougaloo College Tougaloo, MS 39174 (601) 977-7711

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Major funding for the Mississippi American Festival Project has been provided by the Lila Wallace, Reader's Digest Fund and the Ruth Mott Fund .

Additional funding to the presenting organizations has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Southern Arts Federation, Alternate ROOTS, the Mississippi Arts Commission, and the Mississippi Humanities Council.

The Mississippi American Festival Project is a part of the American Festival Project which receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation.