


"DON'T BOTHER ME, I CAN'T COPE," Ford's Theatre, September 15-October 10, 1971
First Annual "LABOR DAY SONGFEST," The Folklore Society of Greater
Washington, Sept. 6, 1971, Sylvan Theatre
"THE FLYING BURRITO BROTHERS" plus "FRAZIER & DEBOLD," Cellar Door, Sept. 17, 1971

IF YOU'VE GOT THE TIME, WE'VE GOT THE MUSIC....
and it's live and wayout , boys and girls...and
there's more to come! Wow! Bow wow!.....
Movies anyone?.....Mr. Valenti! HELP!.....

By Snoopy, Jr. alias Walter B. Smalley
IDEAS * P-O-P * TV-SHOWCASE 

It was old home week for one of this country's most talented young actress-writers on September 11 at Ford's Theatre when Micki Grant returned to a city she had already conquered, but not subdued as yet. By official opening night her subjects were screaming. A new queen was enthroned. If there is to be a Black Ladies Lib Revolution in combo with the Jesus Revolution, count this lady out! She's a liberated queen, but only on her own terms, which is theater, very femme and more of it! She can act, sing, dance, write and make love to the right leading man. She may insist that she can't cope, but in "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope" this lady proved what her long time admirers already knew, that here is an all around talent who is going to make it all the way.

There had been storm warnings before the hurricane Micki arrived. The new Executive Producer of Ford's, Mrs. Frankie Hewitt, had already seen "Cope" being launched from its off Broadway pad at 26 West 20th Street and back in the Spring of this year Walter Kerr of the New York Times and others had been reporting on Vinnette Carroll's Urban Arts Corps and the fact that it had the makings of a major bee hive -- much activity, promises beyond belief until you had seen and experienced its excitement.

Micki Grant has been working towards her goal for a long time. Back in September, 1968, this critic saw her do Gloria in "The Gingham Dog" with Robert Darnell as her leading man at the Washington Theatre Club and before that she had appeared in "Brecht on Brecht" at the same WTC. She also toured the country with famed Lotte Lenya. What, with all her TV credits, she has

been learning all the time and it shows thru.

Her set of numbers that started off the second act began with a piece entitled "Question" that evoked more than it answered. It was a proper female bit of mystique. All of the numbers that followed built up to "Liberated Woman." Her calypso, opined a knowing one, stemmed from the very womb of calypso style, and was good enough to have originated there.

All of this tribute to a dedicated lady stylist is not to denigrate the performances of all those who contributed to the triumph of "Cope." Alexa Bradford's gospel singers set the fast pace from the very beginning, working up to the climactic "Good Vibrations" in the first act that had everyone in the theater clapping their hands, beating their feet and singing with the four hard-working spirits of Black Revival. All God's chillun got the spirit with this number and the hip ones pranced up and down the aisles to press upon the repentant ones the need to take their hands and get with their all black Jesus revolution. Even the Jews and the Gentiles joined in the fun. God and his children were in an uproar and no one seemed to mind. Professor Bradford's voice broke a few times on the opening night in all the excitement, but it was hardly noticed with all that glory beat and all those sinners bent on being saved. One of the better singers among Bradford's strong men was a tall one named Bobby Hill. He was getting in some good solo licks that revealed a real flair even if he was unlisted in the cast spotlight. Not since Charlie Mingus evoked the spirit back in the sixties has there been such irrepressible phrasing of blues gospel as that of the Bradford four taking wing and going right on and on.

It was apparent that a lot of improvisation was going on right up to Washington curtain time. There was even a program insert to the effect that the Langston Hughes numbers were replaced by compositions of Micki Grant's. Only those on the inside know could make comparisons.

Out front there was a lot to be liked. Arnold Wilkerson, a handsome bundle of talent, ended the first act on a note of strength and defiance with his "My Name Is Man." It was quite obvious that Uncle Tom was no longer living in the new world of young blacks. In the second act, this man of Black Distinction was used to make clear that he and Micki Grant had a lot to say together which made for a nice duo. Mr. Man is a man to watch. British trained, he really blossoms in "Cope."

They did not forget those who paved the way for them. The second act also has a tribute to Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and Jimi Hendrix which they call an elegy. Nearly everyone knows their stories. It gave the choreography talent of Talley Beatty and the dancers to pitch the woo with more elan. The musicians down in the pit also had a chance to take over and rip off a number in good jazz combo-pops style. Pianist Danny Holgate and his lads made the most of ~~xxxxxxx~~ it. All in all, there was something for everyone. The cast was small for a musical, the choreography lean, but neat. The beat and the message was the thing, all black and full of joy at the thought that they had arrived at an important way station with Black Theater of today. They had -- and the audience reaction was a call for more of the same. They were sent away hungry. It was a new note for Ford's too, after good ole Charlie Brown's long summer for the little ones. In the PEANUTS and BLACK worlds of losers, it all had the earmarks of winners taking over at Ford's. Wow!

Archie Green has done it again. At the AFL-CIO Labor Studies Center where this this learned Ph.D of folklore has been brooding over old labor wars and songs that tell the stories, it is beginning to look like the unions have ~~xxxxx~~ more than ^{risen} ~~xxxxx~~/above their hungry days. They have been singing about it all over town all summer long and their Labor Day "history of labor in song" was just the cherry on the top of all that whipped cream. It helps

to know that they were aided and abetted by Joe Hickerson of the Library of Congress, President of the Folklore Society of Greater Washington and no small organizer and performer himself.

No one with ears and eyes has to be told that folk singing has arrived in this country. Unlike rock and pops and musical comedy spin offs, it is something that really arrived a long time ago. It was brought along by the settlers and was planted like beans in the hills and the valleys. It grew and changed, but not enough for researchers not to root out its origins eventually, record it and restage it in festivals all over the land or at the Grand Ole Opry down Nashville way where it has ruled the air waves for years now. Fundadmentally "folk" is anthropology in music and lyrics and a major source form for audio-visual entertainment, live, recorded or taped. It is important history, in that it tells a story in mini form that has been passed on from singer to singer.

Labor folk is a rich mother lode, as Archie Green and Joe Hickerson would be quick to tell you. They would much rather reveal it to you through a gathering of singers getting together on their own around the hearth, on a picnic or on a stage for a special occasion. The more informal the better. Informality is the very soul of folk singing.

The Folklore Society of Washington makes many appearances through its members. They are regulars at the Smithsonian, sometimes sponsoring programs and, again, appearing under the sponsorship of other organizations. Such appearances bring them to the attention of others. Rub two folk singers together and you very likely will come up with a festival, for most of them do their thing out of sheer joy of doing it. Anyone who has attended the annual July folk festival of the Smithsonian and similar festivals in other parts of the country know this. Recognized commercial artists appear on the programs, but most of the performers are people who make up the main-

stream of folk artistry in this country, those who do it for love.

The Labor Day Songfest at the Sylvan Theatre was a good example of folk artists and audience responding to a feast of music. It was programmed by Hickerson and Green, but the artists were all local regulars. Andy Wallace and Jonathan Eberhart and their Ringshouters started it off with "Picket Line," an old favorite that Archie said originated in New Jersey. Archie was emceeing. Joe Hickerson did a solo, "Hard Times." Hazel Dickens quickly followed with another labor classic, "Mining Camp Blues," from down Birmingham way, Mike Cooney backing her up. The labor brothers and sisters were just getting warmed up, all the while Archie explained it all to those not familiar with labor lore. The Mehitabel cats on stage sharpened their claws and the dogs out on the lawn were urged to come down close and join in. A lot of them did.

A sister named Helen told about the terrible Avondale Mine Disaster, which, as Archie made clear, had a lot to do with people learning how tough it really was in the mines. Joe Glazer, a big labor wheel, moved forward for a piece of the action. He's a multiple talented man. After all, he has been playing his own compositions in some forty countries all over the world and has recordings and copy to prove it, besides being an important part of the U.S. Information Agency. John Jackson, an old favorite with festival audiences did "John Henry," and an unprogrammed sister from gospel country, Imogene Wilson did "Amazin' Grace." With the good Lawd on the side of all the belaboring they had it won after that, except for the mosquitoes eating on the freeloaders down front and even some of the performers. Well, there had been suggestions of picnic lunching in the advance notices!

Joel and Kathy came on strong with "Job of Journeywork" and after that it was a great big labor hootenanny. Down in the audience Ralph Rinzler, the Smithsonian's big Cheshire Cat, was grinning all over at the thoughts of his own catalytic howling as the feeling spread. By the time handsome Andy Wallace

did his "Dehorn Song" solo he was on the make with a gal out in the audience who was screaming she wanted all of him. That is the way stars are born. Andy poured it on. He and his Ringshouters were getting a big piece of the action by then, but there was more to come.

Joe Glazer had already done a stirring version of "Fight That Line" which had made plain what the whole evening was really all about and Jonathan Eberhart told the tale of "Joe Hill's Last Will." It made old Joe Hill, the Wobblies and T-bone Slim rumble in their graves. It was a long shake from their pre World War I agony days. By the time they reached the grand finale led by Joe Glazer, this critic had joined them on the stage. It was no time to hold back. As Archie said, there is something about "Solidarity Forever," based, as it is, on the greatest tune in U.S. civil war history, Battle Hymn of the Republic. John Brown, Julia Ward Howe and Joe Hill all come up out of their graves at the finish and Mr. Washington's monumental grounds just shook. The mosquitoes kept eating away. They were having it best of all. Even so, the big labor moguls on hand were intimating it might be repeated next year. Y'all come!

On Friday, Sept. 17th, this critic was bent on going to the movies, for he had been preaching his own gospel of late to the effect that movies are better than ever, much to the joy of Mr. Jack Valenti, MPAA's Big Chief, and all his disciples many. But never underestimate the persuasive talent of an impresario with better plans. After a good dinner at Pouget's, this critic was kidnapped. It had happened ^{before several} xxx/years ago when two lady impresarios saw that this critic got to the Carter Barron to see the National Ballet of Canada launch their Karen Bowes as a ballet star in an unforgettable version of "Romeo & Juliet." On a full stomach, it is something else again. Even so, if you want to be awakened from your dead self, there is no better place to go these days than the Cellar Door. It was not even surprising to find Topper Carew and his side man,--Sidekick, Gordon Berl, sitting in with Canadians,

Frazier and Debold, and finishing a set as we were ushered in and squeezed into the already crowded now place of Georgetown. And there was a waiting line forming on the outside. It was a good thing that manager Jack Boyle wanted us there. The main attraction, the Burritos, better known as The Flying Burrito Brothers, had been there once before. It was like a criminal returning to the scene of his crime, only this gang did seem to know what they were heisting on this occasion. It smelled like bread. In return they were offering a generous supply of pops, folk, country and rock, with guitars, a fiddle, drums, all with lungs in full cry. At one time in the middle of it all, thinking perhaps about what the scientists have been saying about decibelitus ruining the ears of young musicians, they even asked the prime ears out front if they were being too loud. The answer was a resounding and ear splitting "no." After all, if their seniors can set off atomic bombs, what's wrong with the small fry being heard for a change with a little rock. Well, it is better than throwing rocks and setting off bombs! Each to his own violence these music lovers seemed to be saying. After that the Flying Burritos were on their own and the kids, including this one by now, enjoyed every minute of it, even going back stage to greet them later, along with their managers, including one lady den mother, married to the leader.

Chris Hillman and Rick Roberts are obviously trying to find their way in a thicket where the young are caught and not sure about the kind of music they really are going to prefer in the months ahead. They can sing and play very well together themselves and they have a real charmer, a fiddler named Byron Berline, backing them. His bird imitation number has particular charm and he knows the old numbers of those he admires, among which he mentioned, the famed Monroe brothers of Kentucky blue grass country. Al Perkins, their steel guitar lad, was a standout among their musicians. There was more here than

meets the eye and ear when they find their direction. The kids obviously loved them and let them know it as they played their favorite numbers of the day. This critic, as well as the impresario, were impressed with their enthusiasm, hopes they make it. Fickle Fate, one of Big Momma Earth's devil deciders, is not so sure about today's music. Lady like, she hasn't made up her mind. You're on your own, men! Meanwhile this critic found out later that Topper Carew and Gordon Berl were stealing off to Canada with Frazier and Debold for a set or two. Musicians sure do lead an unsettled life. Miss Fickle Fate says the trouble with men is that they won't stay put, the huzzy! It comes from tampering with fate. Right, men?

And 30