

SOUTHEAST STYLINGS

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN OF WWW.LIBERATEDMUSE.COM



MBM is an operation that offers artist development and promotional services while serving as a vehicle for Briggs to plan and host events.

Marvin Gaye Gets His “Way” in Ward 7

On April 1, the 25th anniversary of his death, Ward 7 celebrated Marvin Gaye’s life in a dedication ceremony which named the 5200 block of Foote Street in Northeast Washington “Marvin Gaye Way.” Joe Herndon of the legendary Motown singing group the Temptations was on hand to participate in the festivities as were local officials, including Ward 7 councilwoman Yvette Alexander.

“This is just one step in a whole new arts revitalization that is taking place,” said Alexander.

The event took place on the perimeter of Marvin Gaye Park—formerly the Watts-Branch Park—which was named in Gaye’s honor almost four years ago. Gaye used to perform in the Riverside Center located beside the park when the building was a nightclub called the Crystal Lounge. The building now houses the group Washington Parks and People which organizes custodial upkeep of the park. In the building are items that recognize the slain soul singer, including bricks from Marvin Gaye’s boyhood home in Deanwood that was torn down despite the public’s request to declare it a national landmark.

An official Marvin Gaye festival took place Saturday, April 4 to celebrate the life and legacy of the famed Motown singer who was born on April 2. The outdoors festival was held on Marvin Gaye Way in Marvin Gaye Park and featured local performance artists.

CALL FOR ACTS: the Saartjie Project Celebrates the Return of Saartjie Baartman’s Remains to South Africa

Saartjie (pronounced “Sar-key”) Baartman is the known name of the woman known in the 18th and 19th century as the Hottentot Venus. Originally from South Africa, Saartjie was lured to Europe with the promise of being a freed person and allowed to earn an income. Instead, she was paraded through Europe in a traveling circus, forced to expose her body to the looks and proddings of onlookers. Upon her early death, her body remains, including her genitals preserved in a jar were put on display in a European museum. Not until recently were her remains returned to a resting place in South Africa.

To celebrate the 7th anniversary of Saartjie’s homecoming to South Africa, The Saartjie Project is sending out a rallying cry to female artists -- visual & performing -- to participate in a benefit showcase on Saturday, May 2, 2009 at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (CHAW) in SE.

“We will be showcase bold women from diverse genres and disciplines who use art as a catalyst for self-expression, re-definition & healing,” says Jessica Solomon, the Saartjie Project’s artistic director. Proceeds will go to support the Saartjie Project as they head to Minneapolis to perform at the Pedagogy & Theatre of the Oppressed International Conference in late May.

Since their summer 2008 debut, the Saartjie Project has performed in sold out shows extending into 2009. This summer they will perform in the 2009 Capital Fringe Festival held throughout DC.

If you choose to answer the call, email a link to your work and a brief bio to homecoming@thesaartjieproject.org for consideration.

Delonte Briggs Means Business

The students at William E. Doar Jr. Public Charter

NORTHEAST FLAIR

Arts news east of the river and beyond



The Saartjie Project is a collective of black women artists who create performance art inspired by the life of the 18th-century South African woman known as the Hottentot Venus. Photo by Michelle Tafel

School for the Performing Arts in NE know him as Mr. Briggs—the teacher who teaches them the dance form called “stepping” or helps them with math prep for upcoming standardized testing. However, his students would be surprised to know about Mr. Briggs’ extended resume. Briggs, 25, has a performance history that is rivaled by counterparts double his age. Briggs, a professional dancer who grew up around Benning Road in SE, is a former member of the internationally recognized dance troupe Step Afrika. Traveling the world with the company, Briggs is a premier performer in various forms of traditional and contemporary styles of dance. He was featured in this column in 2006, touted as the youngest member of the dance troupe, headed for big things. Fast forward to today and Briggs is all about progression. He has taken his celebrity behind the scenes.

Leaving Step Afrika in 2008, Briggs has leapt out into his own. While teaching during the day, this multi-tasker is part of the nonprofit Art Creates Life and has created his own management group—Mr. Briggs Management (MBM)—which he calls his personal professional passion right now. MBM is an

operation that offers artist development and promotional services while serving as a vehicle for Briggs to plan and host events.

“Mr. Briggs Management started with [singer] Tamika Jones,” Briggs recalls.

He and Jones went to high school together and they both agreed after they went to college that they would try something new in collaboration once they had the opportunity to hook up. After she graduated from Pace University, she had a mix tape project and wanted to do more things. More things has become two CDs on deck set for release with Briggs behind the scenes making it happen.

“Tamika has been all up and down the U Street and Georgia avenue corridor [in NW] -- her foundation is jazz and soul and there is a big circuit for jazz and soul in that area,” says Briggs, her proud manager. “Just about any weekend you can catch her.” Jones has already performed in many of the well-known DC venues, including Cafe Nema, Indulj, Cardinal’s Nest, HR 57, Bohemian Caverns, Twins, Blue Note, Busboys & Poets, and Peaches Cafe.

Briggs is very proud of his work with Jones and the

twenty artists he currently has on his roster. However, he says that his love for community is what motivates and inspires what art projects he takes on. He is preparing for a trip to West Africa with Art Creates Life, an annual trip where professional performers take students from the US to participate in service missions as well as engage in artistic exchange. He is also looking to promote artists that he feels are adding to, rather than taking away from, the community.

“I’m very community involved. I think it’s the full circle that art should make. Music—art—that is full of curse words is useless to me,” Briggs said. What kind of art does he like? Why, of course, “...art that moves towards progression.”

To learn more, visit www.MrBriggsManagement.com or call 202.372.6500. Email Briggs at founder@mrbriggsmanagement.com. To learn more about Art Creates Life, visit www.artcreateslife.org.

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