

THE ARTS PAGE

Haiti—the roots of rebellion

THERE could hardly be a better example of nature following art than the forthcoming production of *The Black Jacobins*.

Written by C. L. R. James, it opens at the Riverside Studios on February 21 and runs until March 15.

At any time this play, adapted by the now 85-year-old author from his novel about Toussaint l'Ouverture and the 1804 revolution in Haiti, would be important and relevant.

But how much more so at this moment with the Haitian people celebrating the downfall of the hated Duvaliers (though by no means yet sure of very much better things to come).

The rising of the slaves led by Toussaint and his more ruthless successor Dessalines was the only successful slave revolt in history.

Originally triggered by the French revolution, the Haitians organised a guerilla army and fought a regular war against Napoleon until they had completely freed their country.

Yvonne Brewster, director of James' play at Riverside Studios, told me about her own history and that of the play.

She founded the Barn Theatre in Kingston, Jamaica 21 years ago, the first vernacular cultural organisation in this traditionally white-dominated British ex-colony.

Many West Indian actors,

Hard on the heels of the ousting of 'Baby Doc' Duvalier, TOM VAUGHAN previews a Haitian classic

directors and writers learned their trade there; in particular Trevor Rhone whose "Smile Orange" has been very successful both in London and the regions.

Black Jacobins has not been presented in England since 1936 when Paul Robeson played Toussaint.

In those days there were so few recognised and trained black actors around in Britain that some of the characters were actually played by white actors in blackface!

This time things will be very different. Yvonne Brewster has set up her own production company — the Talawa Theatre.

"Talawa is an old Jamaican word," she told me. "It means: I'm little but tough — look out!"

Toussaint will be played by Norman Beaton, other leading parts by Trevor Laird, Brian Bovell and Mona Hammond — an all-star cast indeed.

The Haitian revolution followed a classic pattern. Toussaint was the inspiring, charismatic, liberal-minded figurehead, Dessalines the hard man who supplanted him and carried the revolution through to final victory — Danton and Robespierre if you like, or perhaps Lenin and Stalin.

James' play deals not only with revolutionary politics but with the personal lives of the protagonists. Toussaint's love affair with a Frenchwoman contrasted with Dessalines' love for a Haitian woman — another revealing difference in lifestyles.

Yvonne Brewster aims to lead the Talawa Theatre Company on to other Third World, and particularly Caribbean and African productions.

"I'm not very impressed with black theatre over here," she says. "There's still too much grovelling, too much emphasis on how marvellous it is that

blacks are actually at last being allowed to do their own thing in a white man's country, too many introspective plays about racism, too many blacks laughing at comic stereotypes of themselves.

"There is a huge untapped reservoir of African, Caribbean and Spanish-American theatre showing the black experience on a world scale and in a world context.

"There are plays by Nigerian Ngugi wa Thiong'o for instance, just waiting to be given shape by a competent director."

Her next production after *Black Jacobins* will be a play by one of her on proteges — a product of the Barn Theatre, like Trevor Rhone.

Echo in the Bone is by De Scott, a writer whose work is so far unknown in Britain.

If its content and theatrical strength match the incandescent energy and integrity of its director then that will also be a moment worth waiting for.

When the *Black Jacobins* opens, it will be presented against the background, also at Riverside Studios, of an exhibition C. L. R. James — Man of the people, commemorating the 85-year-old writer's life and work — as Trinidadian patriot cricket lover, literary critic,



C. L. R. James—Trotskyist, historian and dramatist.

novelist, historian and Trotskyist politician.

Whether or not you agree with all his views he is plainly a man of great intellectual and moral stature and integrity, well worthy to stand beside his oldest friend and exact co-eval, Fenner Brockway.

■ **'The Black Jacobins'** by CLR James,
presented by Talawa Theatre Company
(Riverside)

This 50-year-old classic charting the slave revolt, fuelled by the French Revolution, which resulted in the birth pangs of an independent Haiti, is without doubt an epic occasion. With 23 actors, full costume, the grand sweep of the Riverside 'space' and, most of all, the range of this extraordinary man's thought, the omens are certainly favourable. A pity, then, that it turns out a vibrantly illustrated history lesson rather than a play to tear your heart out. The characters are little more than shadow-puppets thrown up against a vast historical screen—consequently they can do little to engage the emotions or the intellect. The production exacerbates the problem, providing breadth without depth, movement without pace. Nevertheless, this story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, a remarkable man fired by a dream of an 'impossible' fraternity, is a compelling—and topical—one. And some vigorous performances, especially from Brian Bovell as the 'dangerous' Moise, make it highly watchable. (Sheila Fox)

Play Reviews!

RIVERSIDE

The Black Jacobins

IN A PROGRAMME note, C. L. R. James, author of "The Black Jacobins", written 50 years ago, states "The play has been successful with audiences in Europe, Africa, America and in the Caribbean. But nowhere has it swept the audience off its feet".

With all respect to the distinguished Marxist historian and cricket lover, I am not at all surprised. He has taken an ever-interesting and, as it happens, very topical story, the rise to power of the "Black Napoleon" of Haiti, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and made it into something approaching one of those school plays whose chief virtue is that it has roles for all the Upper Sixth and a few fifth formers as well. In a series of initially short scenes which grow increasingly longer, he charts the course of a revolution, which is inspired and led by a great man who is so moderate that he is prepared to be a Spanish Monarchist, and ends with the country run by a mad, ignorant despot, Toussaint's successor Dessalines.



TREVOR LAIRD as Dessalines

What makes the story so fascinating and makes one wish it were handled by somebody with a stronger sense of theatre is the exotic blend of history, economics and culture which go to make up the background of present-day Haiti. Though France gave it its language and culture, Great Britain and Spain were also involved. Toussaint freed one lot of slaves but had to fight battles against another slave group, the mulattos. All these things are referred to, and even Napoleon himself makes an appearance, in a nicely judged performance by Keith Hazemore, but our knowledge is taken for granted.

The director, Yvonne Brewster, can hardly be blamed for giving such a plodding piece an equally plodding production, and culturally it is extremely relevant to the black community, as well as having a political message which is at the same time a warning for all would-be revolutionaries. The acting is extremely variable, but Norman Beaton does his best to convey the dynamism and intelligence of Toussaint and Trevor Laird gets across both the ridiculous and unfortunately dangerous aspects of Dessalines.

Peter Hepple

BRIAN'S LOOK

PROSPECTS, a new 12 part series from Euston Films starting on Channel Four this Wednesday, is being described as a cross between *EastEnders*, *Minder* and *Only Fools And Horses*. If that sounds a winning formula, then Billy Pearson and Jimmy 'Pincy' Pince could soon be joining Terry and Arfur, Del Boy and Rodders and Pete and Den in the big time. For real-life *East End* lad made good Brian Bovell, who plays Billy Pearson, it's his first major shot at TV stardom after a career that's taken him from youth theatre to *Babylon* and *Burning An Illusion*.

This talented, sensitive 26 year old first started acting as an escape from dead-end jobs. "I left school in 1977 feeling conned and disillusioned", he says. "I didn't enjoy school as much as I could have done, because they don't prepare you for the outside world. The teachers prepared me for what they thought I could be, you know, that I could only aspire to a certain level".

He tried to please his parents by getting a job in a lawyer's firm, but that didn't work out and he ended up moving from job to job. Whilst working in the City Brian met an actor who told him about the Central School of Drama.

"This actor had been through Central so he showed me some pictures and talked about his training which interested me being I was already a film buff, like my father before me. During the 60's, when my parents got a television, my father would tell me who all the actors were and I got into it, finding I could really escape. We even followed the Oscars every year and tried predicting who would win!"

Brian didn't rush to audition for a place at Central immediately - but his last job as a trading estate in

skelter career.

Brian later went on to work with the Black Theatre Co-op (B.T.C.) on 'Mama Dragon', 'Two Handed Snatch' and 'Welcome Home Jacko', which they took to America for five weeks. "It was an exciting time theatre-wise, I worked with Trevor Laird, whom I admire greatly as he is one of the best and foremost black actors in this country - the greatest in the world as far as I'm concerned", he says with genuine sincerity.

Whilst playing in the part of a army private stationed in Northern Ireland in 'Some Kind of Hero' Brian was once again 'lucky' to be spotted by the casting director for 'Prospects' he saw them five times, did a screen test and got the part around Christmas 1984 though he didn't start filming until March 1985. So what is *Prospects* about?, I asked.

"It's about two youngsters living in East London who have been through school together, grew up together and are now sharing a flat together. Pincy, the white character, is always buzzing about he wants to get in on some of the action round town - it's

- so there's a lot of action there"

"In one episode, Pincy decides to start a dating agency. In one episode, Pincy decides to start a dating agency. I'm the down-to-earth one, so I point out all the pitfalls. But he's still very optimistic so we do it, and - this is how the characters are plagued with a kind of luck or fate - it turns out that 'pure' women answer the ads. So we decide to pose as all the men and meet the women at different places! That's the sort of situation: we get ourselves into".

Brian was drawn to the series because the two lads are friends living and getting on together in this society, something not often seen on television whenever a black person is involved.

"Obviously the audience themselves can see that one of us is black and the other white" Brian agrees. "But what they ultimately see is that we are friends. As television is made up of sound and im-

ages this image would really come over especially in these times. Then people would no longer see the problem as being one of black and white confrontation. I believe the final battle isn't between people's colour - it's really between good and evil".

It would be refreshing to see a programme with black and white people just being people, without colour coming into play - but it often seems that if there is one black actor/actress involved in a television drama then we must expect colour to play a major part in the script. It's a shame, because actors and actresses of both colours are trained to portray people's personalities - not their colours. Let's hope *Prospects* will go some ways to changing the situation.

Kamilla Nicol

See On The Box for programme times and details.

• You can also catch Brian Bovell in *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James at Riverside Studios during February and March.



Brian Bovell in an image of unity

LAST DRAGON WINNERS

Winners of The Last Dragon Buzz competition are: J. Johnson, Camberwell SE5; T. Jackson, Nottingham and M. Britton, Warley, West Midlands. The correct answer was DeBerge, prizes on their way.

• Next week, your chance to win the Star Wars blockbuster *Return Of The Jedi* on video. Reserve your copy now!

Chic Magazine March 1986.

INTERVAL

Compiled by
Brenda Emmanus

Thought you better be reminded that you still have time to see **Talawa Theatre Company's** version of **THE BLACK JACOBINS**, at **Riverside Studio, Crisp Road, Hammersmith, London W6.**

The production of CLR James' famous historical play portrays the only truly successful slave revolt in history: the uprising inspired by Toussaint L'Overture and the savage revolution in Haiti which was triggered off by the French Revolution.

Talawa Theatre Company was set up by Yvonne Brewster with the aim of using ancient mythologies and the political experience of our forebears to inform, enrich and further enlighten modern black British theatre. Performances start at 8pm and run until **15 March.**

● This production was commissioned as part of the GLC Black Arts Programme.





GLC

YVONNE BREWSTER

Founder of the Barn Theatre in Jamaica, champion of the forgotten classic black plays, Yvonne Brewster is now the leading black woman theatre director in Britain. As her newly-formed Talawa company present a timely production of C L R James' play about the revolution in Haiti 'The Black Jacobins' she talks to LYN GARDNER about how you can't make culture out of slogans. Photograph by AMANDA SEARLE.

I've had a hell of a time in England but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. The only really new, exciting work happening in theatre in this country at the moment is black and I want to be around to see it develop. Theatrically speaking, England is the most receptive place in the world: nowhere else could all these black companies have burgeoned, survived and received such attention.

'I think one of the reasons behind this flowering is that Black-British is a very new society. Slaves came to America at the same time as the Pilgrim Fathers, the West Indies has been established for 300 years and formed its own cultural character, but the Black-British are just about the only people in the world who are only 35 years old. Thirty-five years in a millennium is absolutely nothing, so what we are witnessing is the generative energy of a people trying to be born.

'I first came to England as a drama student, imagining myself to be the next Sarah Bernhardt. After training, I returned to Jamaica thinking I was the bees-knees only to discover that as a black, trained, actress I was unemployable—doomed to life at the end of the chorus line in "South Pacific" while white amateur English and American ex-pats were in the spotlight "washing that man right out of their hair".

'I met Trevor Rhone who was in a similar situation—English-trained but unable to find work—so we decided to get together. I got my father to move the cars out of his garage and we took the place over and called it the Barn Theatre. There weren't any Jamaican plays so we put on productions like "Miss Julie" and after a while we thought "this is irrelevant rubbish", so Trevor started taping our conversations and improvisations and writing them up.

'Our first new play was "It's Not My Fault Baby", about being a black, trained, actor in Jamaica. That was followed by "Smile Orange", "School's Out", "Old Story Time" and "Two Can Play". Trevor was the writer and I was the director—a good thing, because I'm a lousy actress and it relieved me of having to act.

'It was a marvellous director's training ground, starting not with Shakespeare but with plays that were neither tried nor tested, so you *had* to make them work. Then when you meet a classic like "Raisin in the Sun" (which I directed for Black Theatre Co-op last year) that you *know* will work, it's just sheer joy.

'The Barn is 21 years old now, still in the garage, and has fostered most of Jamaica's new writing. I'm still involved in running it from London. Jamaica's too small. I'm interested in firsts: there I've done radio, television, theatre and films (including "The Harder They Come") but you aren't really allowed to fail in Jamaica. The focus is so small you can't experiment because experiment suggests failure. Trevor (Rhone) is very much affected by this—the plays that he's writing now seem to repeat themselves. I keep saying to him "leave the womb and come to England".

'It's almost 50 years to the day since "The Black Jacobins" was first staged at the Westminster Theatre with Paul Robeson. The cast comprised black Americans and white English actors blacked up. Now, for our production, we have a splendid cast of black people, most of whom have been born in this country.

'What we are witnessing is the generative energy of a people trying to be born'

'I don't see anything wrong with having a political reason for wanting to do something artistic, but what particularly pleases me about this production is that I began by wanting to revive it because I thought that the politics of C L R James were so immensely important to black people in this country today. Then I realised that not only are the politics correct, but it is also a smashing play. It's a very human drama. You can pick out the political figures—that's Trotsky; that's Stalin; that's Lenin—but it's also a love story, so even if you're not attuned to the politics, you can relate to that.

'"The Black Jacobins" is about the only successful slave revolution. Revolutionary tactics are not of primary importance: what matters most is what the play says about *listening* to people. Toussaint L'Ouverture was a fantastically successful leader and even Napoleon reputedly said "If I had let Toussaint rule, I'd never have ended up in St Helena." But his failure was to cease listening and talking to the people, because he presumed that they could not understand his strategy to defeat the French, once and for all.

'When I first asked the GLC for funding for

"The Black Jacobins" they answered "You must be joking! What do you want with six weeks of rehearsal? Black plays don't need more than three." They meant well, but they're bureaucrats they put the application through their computer and it says "Black play equals three weeks rehearsal time." And that's that!

'It's very important to rediscover these old plays like "Raisin" and "The Black Jacobins" which can inform the grassroots theatre coming up now. There are so many good plays, from the '40s and '50s, from Cuba and Latin America. Why doesn't the National do some of them rather than "Measure for Measure" set in the Caribbean with lots of black people prancing up and down speaking Shakespeare? All those jived up iambic pentameters make me want to crawl under my seat. You can sell us as exotic fruit but exotic fruit we are not! Fruit we are.

'There will come a time when they'll *have* to take us seriously. It's no good asking for handout but slowly we're proving that we have an audience and can make money and we'll move into those bigger places—almost by osmosis. That's why I think the Roundhouse Project is such a wasted opportunity. In concept, it's a lovely idea. But in practice, things may run less smoothly. Put somebody in a corner and say "this is where black and ethnic culture will be seen" and that will unfortunately rubbish everything else and set you up to be shot down.

'So what do you do about it? Be as positive and supportive as possible in an effort to inform the powers that be of the dangers. I'm trying not to be divisive or discourage the Roundhouse Project but you cannot make culture out of slogans. What they should have done would have been to form a Roundhouse Company along the lines of the Manchester Royal Exchange, NT or RSC.

'It would have been such an opportunity to have a black company with an artistic director. We've never been able to work long enough together to develop a style and this might have been the chance. I dare say, however, that if the money keeps up, it might naturally develop that way anyway. I hope so. The place has always been a white elephant; we don't want it to become a black elephant! ●

'The Black Jacobins' is at Riverside Studios from Friday as part of the Black Experience Arts Programme. See Theatre Fringe

CONSUMING INTEREST

PINBALL WIZARD

Computer games have several magazines dedicated to them each month, but far more compulsive and accessible is the humble pinball machine. Does there have to be a twist? NIGEL MATHESON finds out.

Behind forbidding metal gates in deepest Islington, far from the stripped pine forests and the luxurious offices of alternative magazines, is a large warehouse owned by Pink Floyd.

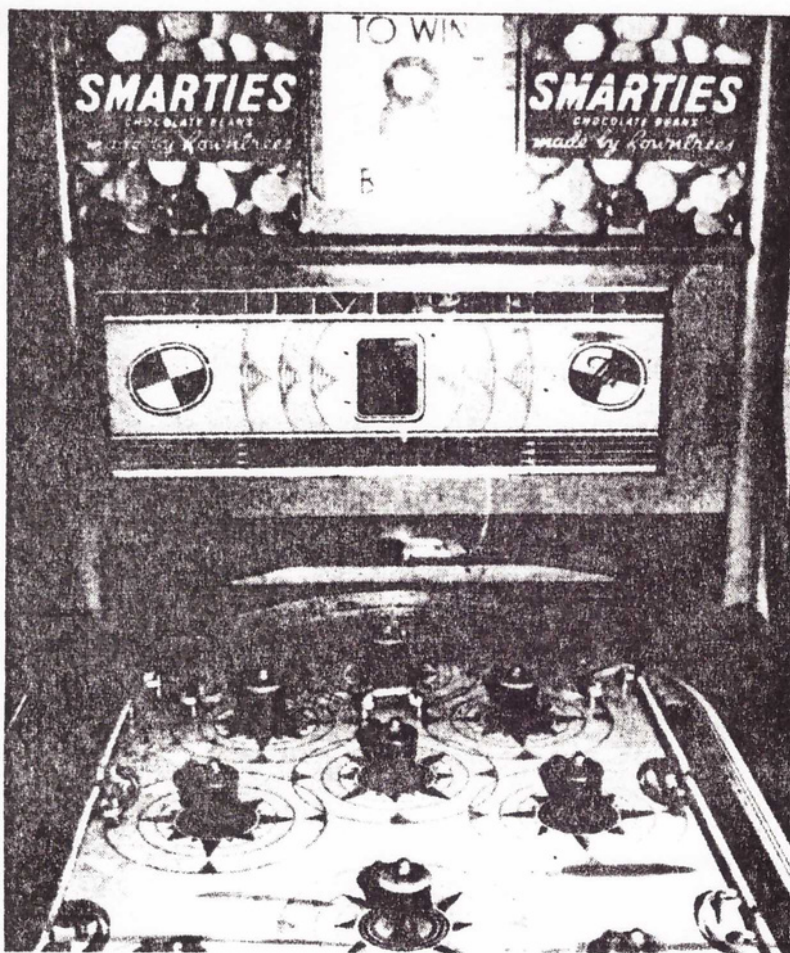
Amongst peculiarities to be found within are a 48 track recording studio, a matt black mountain of stage lighting gantries, and the workshop of pinball obsessive Geoff Harvey.

Geoff met me with 'Greetings' and I was quickly ushered into a neon brite Aladdin's Cave. His HQ is banked to the ceiling with slot machines of every era, size, colour and shape, all delivered here in a mate's Luton van in their various stages of fatigue and dismemberment. It's like a breaker's yard for some, which he around disembowelled and cannibalised. Others are set up ready for play.

Says Geoff, 'This isn't a graveyard for pin-tables so much as a place of limbo. A few of them do come here to die. When they arrive, they're on their last legs and their bits can be used for medical science. But I'm hoping to give the machines a new lease of life. Then they can move on. I'm keeping most of the older ones and quite a few of the newer, in the hope that they will stock a pinball fantasy environment I'm planning to open.'

Geoff is 20 and became obsessed with pinball on holiday in Jersey at the age of 13 when he fell in love with a Chicago Coin Western called 'Gunsmoke' (a copy of which now stands in the workshop). He'd never seen anything as good, and when he got back to London, someone gave him a derelict machine. He was hooked for life. Thousands of pin-tables have since passed through his hands and he currently owns about 240 - 40 here in Islington.

The history of pinball, like many others, is a history of repression. A brash younger cousin of golf, pool, skittles and even marbles, pinball first appeared in the nineteenth century as bagatelle. The first machine, 'Whirl Wind', arrived in the '20s. By the '30s, helped by the depression, pinball was established as a popular cheap entertainment in arcades all over the US. But the stigma of gambling has always hung heavily. Pinball was forced to keep bad company with all those other money hungry slot machines and initially they also made cash pay-outs. Many of the gambling restrictions of the '20s and '30s weren't lifted in some large US cities



Smarties instead of cash from this 1937 machine, following gambling law enforcement.

(LA, NY and Chicago, the industry's home town) until the '70s.

Along the way, crucial improvements always seemed to arrive in time to give the game new life. The Tilt mechanism was an invention of the '30s to decrease the GBH caused by excessive 'body-english', then the only means of controlling the ball on its downward path. This invention also helped turn it from a gambler's pastime to a game of skill. Electricity could operate scoreboards, too, and soon back flashes were being painted to attract custom.

It wasn't till the '40s that 'Humpty Dumpit', the first game with flippers, came along, to the complaints of table-tilting skill purists. Soon the free ball concept introduced non-cash rewards and subsequently pinball went electro-mechanical in the '60s and electronics and micro-processors have made multi-ball and synthesised voices possible for the '80s.

Contrary to opinion, pinball has always moved with the times and contemporary machines are very high tech. However, despite these developments, it is still classified by the UK Gaming Board as a 'game of chance' along with one-armed bandits and fruit machines. Yet video machines are 'games of skill'.

Machines come to Geoff from all over the country. People phone offering old ones, often to be turned down for lack of space. Once someone dumped 80 machines outside his partner's flat without warning. If he wants specific tables, Geoff puts the word out in the pinball world. Sometimes he still has to scour them out from magazines such as *Coin Slot*, *The Pinball Owners Association Magazine* and *Exchange and Mart*, or on visits to coastal amusement arcades where they seem to cluster and cower, driven by the invasion of video machines inland.

'I pick them up for anything from £35 to £200. They cost £2000 new. If I pick one up for £200, then I'll probably sell it for £350 and upwards but a hell of a lot of work will have been done. All the electrics, everything stripped down and repainted too. It can take 200 hours to fix up a really bad machine. The ones I sell tend to be a few mid-'60s models but mostly they're latter-day ones.'

Wandering round the stacked machines, Geoff shows me his oldest two. One is a 1937 bagatelle board which made illegal under-the-counter pay-outs for certain scores. Another, also of 1937, was made just after the game's introduction to electricity. When balls

touch the springs, they complete the circuits and a projector lights up a score. With gambling restrictions, slots were converted. In the '50s, it was converted to pay out Smarties.

Almost all pin-tables are imported from the USA, a truism it would be to miss from the sci-fi/comic book artwork. The graphics run a gamut of escapist themes and youthful passions. Machines of the '40s celebrated space and patriotic heroes, the '50s ones geometric or Technicolor like the '60s loved space or psychedelia resulting in very frisky mauve and green back flashes; the '70s were 'Dungeons and Dragons', heavily heeled pop groups, space again and tie-ins too; the '80s are very much tech/high tack. Many themes recur.

These themes, basically from tra culture, are a rich seam for social anthropologists to mine, and the cultists too. The style is very much book culture meets the fairground, pneumatic women and macho hero from the former and gaudy colour and noises from the latter. Artwork is a staple part of pin culture and the themes of the games are revealing too: 'Ball' (1933), 'Klondike' (1938), 'The Japs' (1943), 'Surfers' (1968), of '6' (1976), 'Space Shuttle' (1976).

Geoff's other machines include 'Wizard', released after the success 'Tommy' (a film Geoff couldn't go see for many years, unable to bear the idea of pin-tables being destroyed, alone Oliver Reed's singing), and 'Silverball' whose artwork reveals a orgasmically connected to a pinball machine.

Electro-mechanical machines are technically but they have miles of that can go horrible wrong. If you're reasonably technically proficient, you do those up yourself. Electronic are more reliable but a complex hell when they do break down. If you're going to buy a pin-table, the advice is much that for anything else. Don't rush. Go and look at several machines. If I don't know much about them, see a seller will help when things go wrong. Look inside and under the playing field. Make sure it's all there. Private buyers usually keep pin-tables in better condition and often sell because they mastered their machine and want to on to something new.

And an advert for Geoff himself: pin-tables. I'm not cheap but I'm expensive. I don't sell rubbish and I don't sell perfection. After-sales service includes delivery and installation with spirit level.

Geoff Harvey, 20, Shepherdess Walk, London N1. Tel: 246 6327 (Anafonic).
Pinball Owners' Association, Cranbrook Rd, Ilford, Essex IG6 6LH. (M) 0181 773 50 (annually).

The Black Jacobins/Riverside Studios

Michael Coveney

The story of how the Caribbean island of San Domingo, a wealthy French colony, became the independent state of Haiti following the slave revolt of 1791, is a fascinating one, the subject of C. L. R. James's renowned 1938 study *The Black Jacobins*. But James, a Marxist historian and cricket writer, had fashioned the material a few years earlier; his play, *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, was given for two performances at the Westminster Theatre almost exactly 50 years ago. Paul Robeson leading the cast and the rebellion as the legendary rebel and freedom fighter.

It is a play on an epic scale, shuttling between San Domingo and the Tuileries where Napoleon, at the end of the decade, is fretting over Toussaint's proposed constitution. It shadows the French Revolution itself (Toussaint was the subject of a Wordsworth sonnet); indeed, Toussaint's successor, General Dessalines, is a sort of Robespierre to his innovative Danton. Recent turmoil in Haiti is accommodated, a little crudely, in this production, with confusion and unease settling in as the English traders arrive. Dessalines goes mad and declares himself Emperor. The Duvaliers are not far away.

Yvonne Brewster's production is ambitious, continuously inter-

esting but rough around the edges. One notes a lot of cutting and dramaturgical fiddling, but not enough. The acting meanders. But how novelous to see a large-scale project—presented by the newly formed Talawa company, but full of familiar faces—tackling such important and pertinent historical issues. James's book is very good at pointing up the tensions between blacks and mulattoes in the revolution, and his play

shows the mulatto whore Marie-Jeanne (Mona Hammond) skipping between the French generals and her politically devout lover Dessalines (Trevor Laird).

Toussaint's role in the affair is well documented, although we are denied a final prison scene and there is an over-compressed air about Norman Beaton's transformation from jovial, dynamic pragmatist to the dejected, exhausted victim of the power game, signing the

death warrant of his favourite nephew (Brian Bovell as the laughing one-eyed Moise L'Ouverture). But for all its unevenness, the play bristles with the arguments for and against San Domingo remaining, as Toussaint wants, a French colony with its own constitution. Hard-line supporters are as scornful of that proposal as is Napoleon, for different reasons.

The show, designed by Andrea Montag, is set against some imposing stone colonial arches decorated with the flags of the island, Britain, France and America, with a platform area that is most tellingly used in the sharp and funny Napoleon scene. Keith Hazemore, kiss-curved and thigh-flexing Boney toying scornfully with the sympathetic Colonel Vincent (Doyne Pryor).

Beaton grows to magnificent effect as he blasts out his intention of bringing Africans to San Domingo to be both French and free and he shrivels, movingly to the native politician dreaming of Sundays on a plot of land. We have voodoo dancing, drums and minuets, and notable support from Bob Phillips and David Haynes. Part of the GLC's Black Experience, this is the sort of show, alongside the Tricycle's *Great White Hope* and some of the new plays, that lends dignity and credibility to the British black theatre movement.



Alexander Muir

Norman Beaton and Trevor Laird

Borodin Quartet/Elizabeth Hall

Dominic Gill

The extraordinary Borodin Quartet are such a homogeneous ensemble that it is impossible to praise a single member without instantly regretting having left out the other three. On every page of yesterday's music-making—the second of seven recitals devoted to the complete quartets of Shostakovich—there were striking individual felicities: notably from Mikhail Kopelman and Valentin Berlinsky, since first violin and cello are a string quartet's natural lyrical protagonists, though not less frequently either from second violin and viola, whose counterpoint of inner voices was uncommonly subtle and rich. But each tour de force, brilliant in isolation, never drew the focus to itself—the virtuoso detail served only to intensify the image, and the complex resonance, of the fourfold web.

For their second programme the Borodin gave the early, and really the first substantial, second quartet in A major op. 68 together with no. 12 in D flat, the first of the last "late" four. Both performances were miracles of compression and energy—but that of the later quartet especially, its opening paragraphs drawn out like a delicate tapestry, the colours misty, the textures, almost orchestral in their fullness, piquant, wistful. The remarkable four-part finale of no. 12, a massive scrapbook unified by no perceptible thread except an unfailing, incandescent and unpredictable invention, was for the first time in my experience vividly convincing from

first to last: from wild glissando nightmare to sweetest threnody the Borodin's grip was faultless.

I have remarked before on the exhilarating range of tone colour which the Borodin command, from huge chamber-orchestral sonority to intimate gossamer thread. They are also one of the few string quartets playing today who use vibrato not as a constant background texture but as a true and wonderfully varied expressive device, whose absence can be as startling as its presence. The sonority of the three lower strings, entirely senza vibrato, as they accompanied the first violin's recitative in the A major quartet was unforgettable.

table: dark organ tones, d gamba and reeds.

Their Shostakovich recital was not the Borodin's or appearance yesterday. At luncheon in the Barbican Hall it offered a short programme, including a sublime account of their namesake's second quartet (their record of it Borodin's quartets should be every music-lover's shelf), a marvellously concise and w performance of Stravinsky's little Three Pieces. There were still empty seats in the Elizabeth Hall, though fewer on Sunday. Don't delay: London's audiences have sense at all, the rest of the world will be sold out by

Il barbiere di Siviglia/Covent Garden

Richard Fairman

GLC

1981-1986

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THE VIOBEE BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE

LABOUR PAINS

★ YOU'VE got nothing to lose but your chains—watch out for The Black Jacobins a play about the historic slave revolt of 1791 in Haiti at the Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith from February 27-March 15.

DAILY MIRROR PINK 'UN, Monday, February 17 1986

Preview



Norman Beaton stars as Toussaint L'Ouverture in *The Black Jacobins* (Photo: LWT)

● The true story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the successful slave revolt against French rule in Haiti, provides the backdrop for C.L.R. James' historical epic *The Black Jacobins* at Hammersmith's Riverside Studios (Feb 21 - March 15; 8pm). Based on James' historical study of the same title, it's the first time the production has been staged in Britain since Paul Robeson's 1940 premiere production - although the play has been successfully staged in Africa, The West Indies and the States. The first production by noted Jamaican director Yvonne Brewster's Talawa Theatre Company, the play stars Nor-

man Beaton as L'Ouverture, *Black Silk* Monty Hammond, Trevor Laird, Brian Bovell and features a cast of over twenty - one of the largest black casts to be seen on a London stage. Tickets are priced £5.50/£4/£3.50 corner. Previews (Feb 21-25) and matinees £4/£2.50. For further information phone 748 3354

● *The Black Jacobins* is presented as part of 'A Man Of The People', a major exhibition at Riverside on the life and works of the great orator, writer, philosopher, historian, pan-Africanist and cricket enthusiast C.L.R. James. Both events are funded by the GLC as part of the Black Experience season.

Reasons to be cheerful...

2-3-86

THERE are two reasons that CLR James should be pleased right now. One is the success of the current exhibition on his life and work at the Riverside Theatre in London, which last week saw the revival (after 50 years) of his play about a slaves' revolt in Haiti in 1791, *The Black Jacobins*.

The Riverside events are a tribute to James's position as the Caribbean's most perspicacious intellect. Socialist, pan-Africanist and savant, his writings on politics, history, aesthetics and cricket span six decades.

Cricket is the other reason James should be pleased. In the Caribbean, the likes of Garner, Marshall and Richards reign triumphant; the English are undergoing annihilation at the hands of the West Indies. This ritual slaughter affords James scant satisfaction: England, he reflects wryly, are being annihilated by everybody.

"I fear they no longer play to win, but to prevent themselves losing." It is, he says, a malady of the spirit.

Such does not apply to James himself. Now 85, he may be frail in body, but in the sparse, ascetic room in the Brixton area of London where he now lives, there is a luminescence of spirit and a palpable air both of sanity and optimism. There are a few people — a very few — whose company leaves one feeling enriched and strengthened. CLR James is one of them.

Consider him on cricket. "Everything I know and feel and am responsive to in the world is contained within the game: the relationship between the team and its individual members; physical activity; the elements of leadership, loyalty, perseverance and dignity; even the weather.

"Every mortal thing that you can think of in regard to social activity is in cricket; a series embraces all life. Watching it, you are seeing much more than when you observe politics."

The metaphor is a useful one for James. He was a Trotskyist until 1938, when he met Trotsky in Mexico for discussions about world revolution — and cricket.

"My change of heart had nothing to do with him as a person. He was perfectly nice, but the questions I asked him he could not answer. Nobody could. The role of the individual, the role of the team or of society, the matter of historical inevitability ... these questions are so tied up in personalities, historical precedent, even climate, that they cannot be answered by any single ideology. My politics cannot be governed by any system. I take the game as it comes."

Human goodness, he says, is not a question of God; the world progresses as result of historical circumstances, and our future depends on our readiness to learn from them.

"The rifle and the cannon have meant great deal in the progress of the totality of humanity, because it is through an awareness of the powers of destruction that we rise to higher thinking."

I believe capitalism is heading for destruction. The world is moving more and more towards an egalitarian society, as people become more educated by television and newspapers. Communications create a society where people become aware of their obligations to each other, as society puts humanity



James: 'Every mortal thing you can think of is in cricket'

cause of the knowledge that we are destroying ourselves."

James himself has no thought of giving up the ghost. A new volume of his essays is to be published this month, and he has a book on Shakespeare "in his head" that will re-evaluate the Bard's emergence in Elizabethan England.

"There is a lot of nonsense talked about that period. Shakespeare is unique and his genius demands explanation. It is very important in our estimation of Britain and the British people."

Shakespeare's complete works crowd the shelves of his room, along with volumes of Marx and Lenin, history,

literature and cricket. James is a man who has discovered contentment through knowing the true value of things. Knowledge of Peru, of Greece in the fifth century BC is to hand; so too is the music of Beethoven, Mozart and Bach.

He can go to the National Gallery and see some of the world's greatest paintings. He has his memories of Garfield Sobers as cricket's greatest all-rounder. "I have an enormous number of the basic necessities of high civilisation at my disposal. It's there for anybody. That is the world we live in. It's a dangerous world. But it has immense possibilities."

● *The Black Jacobins*: review, page 39

● **HOW FAST imperial glories fade.** In 1890, when the Cavalry and Guards Club took out a nice long lease on its home in London's Pall Mall, it must have been unthinkable that one day somebody would have the nerve to suggest that the warriors should decamp with their glorious memories, padded armchairs and G&Ts. Especially not to go begging for a corner of a former colony's high commission around the corner.

But Stockley PLC, ultimate inheritor of the original aristocratic freeholders, has given the soldiers warning of their marching orders. The company has been muttering about turning the grade two listed building into a luxury hotel or some swish flats. The club's 2,500

billet in the nearby Jamaican high commission. They would rather just renew the lease and carry on as before.

So, with the whiff of battle in their nostrils, the members plan to fight back. One, who declined to reveal name, rank or serial number, gave a warning again, underestimating the level of resistance. "The concept of whisky-swilling colonels' last stand is a figment of imagination. Stockley, be warned: this club is very well organised, with the very best professional advice. Then again, so was the German army in the last show."

Working for London
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February 90p



Trevor Laird in
"The Black Jacobins"

THE BLACK JACOBINS portrays the only truly successful slave revolt in history: the uprising inspired by TOUSSAINT L'OVERTURE and the savage revolution in Haiti which was triggered off by the French Revolution.

NORMAN BEATON as Toussaint L'Overture. TREVOR LAIRD and MONA HAMMOND head the cast of over twenty. This production is to be presented as part of the Focus of C L R James Festival 'A Man of the People'. For more details ring Nick Owen of Andrea Farrell on 741-2251.

On what will be a unique experience for British theatre, Talawa Theatre Company will be presenting C L R James's famous historical play, THE BLACK JACOBINS, from February 21st to March 15th at Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith, London.

The GLC's Third Black Theatre Season continues this month with The Black Theatre Forum in RAKSHASHA'S RING. (5th February — beginning of March.)

This play is a fable based on a classical Indian treatise

Company Magazine August 1983



BRIAN BOVELL, 25

TRAINING *On the street*

WORK includes appearing in *Scrape Off The Black* by Tundi Ikoli; *Where There's Darkness* by Caryl Phillips (Drama magazine's Best Supporting Actor Award); *Macbeth*

Brian is one of our most talented rising young actors but it was only five years ago that he chucked in his factory job and tried, unsuccessfully, to get into the Central School of Drama. 'So I joined the Activists at the Royal Court Young People's Theatre. It had a great atmosphere with everyone mucking in. I went there every day.

'I've been lucky and worked with good playwrights like Caryl Phillips, so I have no hang-ups about not being trained. I remember going to one drama school party where everybody kept asking me, "Well, did you train, Brian?" and I'd reply, "Yes, I trained on the street!"

Brian has recently been shooting the plum co-lead in a Channel 4 series called *Prospects* (to be shown early next year) that should rock him to wide audience appeal. Kamilla Blanche (see page 44) will play his girlfriend. Set in the *Isle of Dogs*, it's a comedy-thriller based on the adventures of a black and a white youth who share a flat.

'I went to the Laurence Olivier Awards a while back. When Anthony Hopkins came on I thought, "Let me work alongside you." I'm not star-struck - I just want a chance to show what I can do.'

riverside studios

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1st September, 1986.

Dear Parminder,

Apologies for the ridiculously long time this has taken to reach you - ie. enc. Black Jacobins Press coverage, but I have been doing a final 'Clear-out' at Riverside and thought these had been sent off to you long ago! Hope they will be of some use now.

Do hope you're well. I have just returned from the Edinburgh Festival and am preparing to go out to Baltimore, USA to work on Marketing/Development at a theatre called Theatre Project. I will be returning in December, so hope to see you in the New Year.

With best wishes,

Annie

Annie Reddick.

With compliments