

# CCH Pounder plays doctor in 'Benny & Joon'

By DEBRA JONES

Special to the AmNews

CCH Pounder, the multi-talented actress of stage, screen and television, plays the strong yet sensitive psychiatrist in the charmingly offbeat romance "Benny & Joon." A versatile actress, Pounder has played many different roles in her career, but never one of a Jewish, male psychiatrist.

At a press junket in New York for the movie "Benny & Joon" (Pounder was not available for interviews), the *Amsterdam News* asked director Jeremiah Chechik what made him choose Pounder for the role.

"CC is such a great actress. I knew her work from 'Bagdad Cafe,'" said Chechik, "That's what I'd seen her in. This woman walks in and auditions, and I'm blown away, right across the room. I won't mention the other actresses who auditioned, but there were some amazing actresses there.

"CC's so (not being able to finish the sentence because he was so overwhelmed)... The role was actually written as a man, a Jewish man, a White Jewish man. So it shows you where I'm at. I told my cast, even though it's written

that way, I want you to bring in actors, I don't care. She came in, and it wasn't written as a Black woman. She was just so great. She just came in and made the part hers. I was delighted, she was so great. She's so talented."

## See Pounder's performance

If you had no intentions of seeing "Benny & Joon," you would want to see it just to see Pounder's performance. The caring and concerned psychiatrist, Dr. Garvey, Joon Pearl, Pounder's performance is all that Chechik says it is.

Pounder's previous feature film credits include significant roles in "Postcards from the Edge," "Prizzi's Honor" and "All That Jazz." Pounder also starred in the feature "Dancing As Fast As I Can," done in Ethiopia, not to be confused with the similarly titled film starring Jill Clayburgh. She will next be seen in the Paramount feature "Silver."

On television, Pounder was most recently seen in a starring role in the ABC telefilm "For Their Own Good." She includes among her other credits "The Ernest

Green Story," "Common Ground," "Murder in Mississippi," "No Place Like Home," "The Atlanta Child Murders," "If Tomorrow Comes" and Hallmark Hall of Fame's "The Resting Place." In addition, she has guest-starred on such popular series as "Quantum Leap," "Hill St. Blues," "L.A. Law" and "Cagney and Lacey."

## Extensive theater work

The stage has also been good to Pounder. She has worked on Broadway, off-Broadway and in regional theatre. Her extensive repertoire includes "Open Admissions" at N.Y.'s Music Box Theatre; the N.Y. Shakespeare Festival presentations of "Coriolanus" and "The Mighty Gents"; "Mumbo

Jumbo" at Lincoln Center; and regional productions of "Anthony & Cleopatra," "Sea Plays," "The National Health," "For Colored Girls . . .," "Mother Courage" and the one-woman play "Zora."

In keeping with the best of company, the other cast members in "Benny & Joon" are Johnny Depp (Sam), Mary Stuart Masterson (Joon Pearl), Aidan Quinn (Benny Pearl), Julianne Moore (Ruthie) and Oliver Platt (Fitz).

In 1989 when producers Susan Arnold and Donna Roth were brought a screenplay by Barry Berman, Arnold in particular was especially struck with the compelling character of Joon Pearl. The producer has worked for several years with the Imagination Work-

shop, a California-based arts program that works with underprivileged and disenfranchised people as well as psychiatric patients.

Arnold says, "My experience with the workshop certainly piqued my desire to make a movie about someone who has had a little bit harder time in life than most of us."

Of his role in "Benny & Joon," Depp says, "I've been lucky enough to do things I've wanted to do."

The uplifting message in "Benny & Joon" is that there is someone for everyone. Although Joon is mentally ill and Sam is altruistic, they fall in love and make the best of their situation. So-called "damaged individuals," as shown in "Benny & Joon," can live productive lives.

# Gent III featured at the Ark

The Ark, 135 E. 22nd St., Brooklyn, has A Mother's Day Weekend Special, featuring Gent III performing at a concert and dance Saturday, May 8. Showtime is at 1 a.m.

After 5 Productions, which sponsors the "Oldies But Goodies" entertainment, promises "roses for everyone who brings their mother."

Gent III, as they have added to their repertoire, have also added to their personnel.

Donald "Don" Gentry, the Virgo with the slicing falsetto, and brother Fred "Freddy G" Gentry had been a duet for years until Walter "Wali" Percell joined to make them a trio. With the addition of the Leo tenor and sexy Sagittarius baritone respectively, Gent III began to garner a cult following consisting of admirers with good ears for musical excellence and brothers who could take a song and make it their own.

Now that Alvin "Al" B. Washington has joined forces with these mature gentlemen, his Sagittarius personality has brought an even



GENT III

greater musical impact on the listening ear. His voice contributes a style to the group that leaves you gasping for more. In fact, Gent III's effect on a crowd full of women evokes squeals of delight. It's the strength of their delivery and sweet personality that balances out the force of their voices.

Although they can sing like

Eddie Kendricks, love you down like Marvin or materialize as any one group from the '60s through the '90s, Gent III has an identity all its own, one built on their fans' appreciation and approval, as they continue to keep the soul of r&b alive. They are four men with one message, "Let's maintain the spiritual aspect of music."



URBAN BUSH WOMEN

# Urban Bush Women 'cooking' with dance, music at The Kitchen

By CHARMAINE PATRICIA WARREN

Special to the AmNews

Urban Bush Women (UBW) began two programs of dance last weekend which will continue this weekend (Wednesday through Sunday) at The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. Last week ended with a benefit "Dance Party and Performance Jam," where folks came, danced, ate and supported this nine-year-old company, established by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. Guests and special guests who joined UBW in the afternoon performance before the party were Hattie Gossett, Toshi Reagon, Soul Sauce, Junior "Gabu" Wedderburn with Ancient Vibrations and DJ Don Meisner.

Program one, which runs until Saturday, May 8, offers "Life Dance III... The Empress (Womb Wars)," a New York premiere, and "Nya: Dreamtime," a work in progress. "Life Dance III" comes with text by Zollar, set design by Helen Oji, costumes by

Stephani Mar and lighting by Phil Sandstrom. "Nyabingi Dreamtime" will feature music by Wedderburn, Meissner, Ancient Vibrations and UBW plus lighting design by Kristabelle Munson. Both works were choreographed by Zollar in collaboration with the company: Terri Cousar, Maia Claire Garrison, Christine King, Treva Offutt, E. Gaynell Sherrod and Valerie Winborne.

Program two, an evening-length work entitled "I Don't Know But I've Been Told, If You Keep on Dancin' You'll Never Grow Old" (expanded version) will also run this weekend but for one performance only, Sunday, May 9. Featured guests are Jeanne Lee, Edna Lima, C. Scoby Stroman of Miki D. and Friends, and "natural" body builder Linda Thomas.

## Award recipients

1991 was a good year for UBW. They were recipients of the New York Dance and Performance

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# Mother's Day Special: 'For Love of My Black Women'

By KAREN CARRILLO

Special to the AmNews

One would think that the title of writer, director and producer Titus Walker's play "For the Love of My Black Women" hints at an evening of righteous, devotional theater in praise of African-American women. Theater along those lines can be reaffirming but is often so boring it brings tears to your eyes.

The Ujamaa Black Theater's production is not at all boring. In a series of vignettes, the theater's actors explore Black male and female relationships as they begin, end and are in progress. Often the relationships are strained, divorce and infidelity are common themes. But positive and negative aspects are taken in stride and usually examined comically.

Walker appears before the show begins to welcome the audience. In a voice reminiscent of church preachers, he said: "Raise your hand if you've ever been in love." The audience giggled a bit. Some raised

their hands. "Raise your hand if you've ever been hurt by love." The giggles turned to laughter and more hands raised. "Raise your hand if you've ever been a victim of love." More laughter and more hands, a man near me complained he didn't have enough hands for all the questions.

## Ethnic theater roots

As the show begins (and it's definitely more a show than traditional play), a live band plays as male cast members enter singing, "For the Love of My Black Woman." The rhythms behind most of the songs are r&b or gospel-inspired with the occasional quasi-calypso beat. The musical points towards the production's ethnic theater roots.

This is not theater with a high moral purpose or theater with a particular political message: it's good-time theater, it's come-out-to-see-a-show-and-hear-some-music-laugh-sing-and-be-enter-

tained theater. If the Ujamaa Black Theater did not have its own space, this is the kind of production that would travel to Black communities around the nation.

Aaron Bennett, Chinitia Peebles and Angeliqe Bellamy are the vocalists who end up being the few distinguishable cast members in the show. The cast is very large, and although everyone is used as a central character in at least one vignette, it's difficult to keep up with the many different faces.

Some actors need to work harder at articulation. Although they projected their voices well, it's often difficult to understand what they were saying. Besides those minor faults, "For the Love of My Black Women" is a fine show sure to entertain anyone who can identify with the Black experience. There is a special Mother's Day performance May 9 at the Martin Luther King Auditorium, 122 W. 65th Street. For more information call (212) 787-7944.