

# What's Happening

By Ida Peters

## 'Heliotrope Bouquet' ... sensual theatre experience

"The Heliotrope Bouquet" by Scott Joplin & Louis Chauvin, written by Eric Overmyer, was a thrilling, sensual, theatre experience. Play opened last Wednesday in the new Head Theatre on the fourth floor of Center Stage Theatre of Maryland in Baltimore.

The Head Theatre, which cost \$5.9 million to refurbish, is a visual delight and Christopher Barreca, the set designer, has outdone himself for this turn of the century play which opens in a warehouse, New Orleans style . . . dawn breaking thru shutters at the back of the stage. As the whores, dressed in white, descend a spiral staircase and wash their faces in glass wash basins, you are back in the 1900s and in a ragtime mood.

Without thinking, you note that Costume Designer Catherine Zuber has recreated actual turn of the century clothes, including shoes for the women, hats and shoes for the men for what Eubie Blake would say . . . "sporting houses and cutting contests." contests."

As the program states, Scott Joplin was a great ragtime pianist known worldwide for his opera "Treemonisha" and became even greater known when his opening bars of "The Entertainer" were used in the 1973 production of "The Sting," starring Robert Redford.

For the record, Scott Joplin



A scene in an opium den shows (L) Victor Mack (Chauvin), Monti Sharp (Joplin), Gina Torres (Joy). Front, Linda Cavell and Denise Diggs.

and Louis Chauvin are not the authors of this play. They were the authors of a great ragtime piano piece, "The Heliotrope Bouquet," a collaboration that inspired Eric

Overmyer to write this play . . . "neither a biography or a musical, but a meditation on the artistic process."

The play uses dream sequences as Scott Joplin, at 49

is ill with syphilis from too many visits to the whore upstairs where he lives with his second wife Lottie, his hands too feeble to play the piano. He worries about his lost opera, "Guest of Honor," struggles to finish "Treemonisha" and calls up Louis Chauvin in a dream to help him remember and rewrite "The Heliotrope Bouquet" . . . Chauvin, a musical genius who could neither read or write music, does the middle and Joplin finishes the beginning and ending.

The cutting contests, the opium den sequences choreographed by Donald Byrd whose "Honey Child Milk" recently played at The Theatre project), are pure genius.

Bravos to this talented young cast and to Dwight Andrews . . . music director. Andrews has done "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" and "Miss Evers's Boys."

Essener R who plays Spanish Mary/Lottie/Belle has worked with the Crossroads Theatre which is doing "Black Eagles" at Fords. Monti Sharp (Joplin) played Cory in "Fences" at Arena Stage in D.C. Victor Mack (Chauvin) has been seen on "One Life To Live" and in "The Colored Museum." He has also worked with Crossroads Theatre. Jeffery Thompson (Turpin) was last seen at Center Stage in "The American Corner."