“STILL BURNING”
Play Review by Billy X Jennings

“Still Burning” is a wonderful play, created and performed by students at the Oakland School for the Arts, depicting the history and growth of the Black Panther Party. I would like to thank the entire cast for their fantastic and enthusiastic job. The students researched the subject matter and conducted several personal interviews with Panthers and descendants of Panthers that became the basis/material for the script. Victor Talmadge did a great job as director and Joyce Lu for all the work she did to make this happen.

The play depicts various characters who are mostly young people growing up during the 60’s in Oakland, CA. It demonstrates their involvement with the social issues of the time, such as, police brutality, the Vietnam War, decent education and drugs. There was particular concern about the War due to the military draft. Not only does this play reflect the philosophy of the Black Panther Party, but woven within is the outlook of the Oakland Police Department during this time.

The music selections are a direct reflection of the 60’s or 70’s. They include Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye and Earth, Wind and Fire. The subject matter included what it took to become a Panther, the duties and responsibilities of a Panther, the political education and the Survival Programs of the Black Panther Party. The play also dealt with general issues of race relations and class attitudes.

Not only did this play discuss problems, but it also addressed solutions; especially regarding community volunteerism and responsibility. It demonstrated how young people worked within their communities to improve peoples’ lives. At one point, even the police admit that the social programs of the Black Panther Party did a lot of good in their communities.

“Still Burning” is worthy of being seen by a larger audience. It is a valuable learning tool, helping to breakdown myths about the Black Panther Party. It reflects a significant part of Oakland history. Hopefully, the play can be performed during the upcoming year, marking the 40th year anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party and during Black History Month.
Stage Manager.................................................Sophia Andrews
Assistant Stage Manager.................................Zeneya Gadlin
Scenic Design..................................................Ian Murphy
Costume Design...............................................Ebony Burton
Lighting Design...............................................Quinn Whitaker
Poster Design...............................................Danielle Allen and Mary Blake-Booth
Lobby Display................................................Mariela Salvador, Terrance Banks and Nick Kalish
House Manager (Friday).................................Quiana Webster
House Manager (Saturday)..............................Jenevieve Harrison
House Manager (Sunday).................................Linterroo Babers
Stage Crew.......................................................Production Design Students
Front-of-House Staff.................................Arts Management Students

Faculty

Theatre Department Chair.................................Josy Miller
Guest Artist....................................................Victor Talmadge
Dance Department Chair.................................Reginald Ray Savage
Visual Arts and Design Department Chair.............Kimberly J. Scott
Arts Management Department Chair.................Tom Haygood
Arts Management Department Faculty................Agustin Luna

Administration

Director.........................................................Loni Berry
Assistant Director (Arts).................................Jason Miller
Assistant Director (Academics).........................Taura Musgrove
Middle School Principal.................................Kay Anderson
Student Affairs Director.................................Giselle Hendrie
Director of Admissions...................................Uday Joshi
Director of Facilities......................................Freddy Porter
Director of Technology...................................David Smith
Director of Finance.........................................Laurie Cooperman
Graphic Designer.........................................Todd Zimmer

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THEATRE DEPARTMENT

STILL BURNING
A play developed from the words of former Black Panthers and their descendants

FRIDAY DECEMBER 9 - 8 pm
SATURDAY DECEMBER 10 - 8 pm
SUNDAY DECEMBER 11 - 1 pm

BIG TOP THEATER

1800 SAN PABLO AVENUE | DOWNTOWN OAKLAND
510.873.8800 | WWW.OAKARTS.ORG
Conceived by Victor Talmadge
Created, written and arranged by Victor Talmadge and Joyce Lu
with the assistance of the students of The Panther Project at
Oakland School for the Arts.

Directed by Victor Talmadge
Assistant Directed by Joyce Lu
Choreography by Reginald Ray-Savage

Cast

CK.......................... Terry Stanley
BD.......................... Caelayn Edwards
BD Understudy.............. Vincent Waldron
BX.......................... Evelyn Griffin
Panther...................... Sharolyn Terrell
Bobby H...................... Neicsa Jackson
JR............................ Amaya Keller
JK............................ Mychal Skipper
AK............................ Neiman Scott
CN............................ Shannon Matesky
madison Montoya........... Mychal Skipper
Elaine Levine............... Amaya Keller
Arielle Levine.............. Madison Montoya
Annie Freitas.............. Zalena Chavis
Zalena Chavis.............. Jay Treanna Watt
Oceane Hooks-Camilleri.... Imani Bryan

Theatre is by its very nature a collaborative art form. As with any art form, the creative process is as important as the final result. Our process was unusual. We video taped interviews of former Black Panthers and their descendants, transcribed and edited those interviews, and developed a script. In the spirit of collaborative spirits, the students who have participated in this project were able to be involved in the creation of a play from its inception. They have worked as collaborators in the purest sense of the word, and in an unusually compressed period of time. Normally a play that is already written is rehearsed and performed in a two-month period. These remarkable students have helped to write, rehearse and perform STILL BURNING in just ten weeks. I am humbled by their effort.

When I first suggested this project to Mr. Berry, he immediately saw the possibilities.

I thank him for providing the opportunity to produce a play that bears witness to the rich history of the people of Oakland, that connects the past community with its present and future. Likewise, without the support and encouragement of both Mr. Miller and Mrs. Miller, this very ambitious experiment would not have come to fruition. I am also indebted to Ms. Joyce Lu, my Assistant Director, whose talent, hard work and keen eye have been an integral part of the success of this venture. Finally, I applaud the students whom you will see on stage tonight. Their courage in embracing a process that was unfamiliar has touched me deeply. They have taught me much. I am reminded of a saying from the Bible:

“A person has three names.
One he is born with,
One others give him.
And one he must earn for himself.”

Tonight, these very talented students have earned their third name. Thank you for sharing this evening with us.

Victor Talmadge

We wish to thank and attribute the following resources:

Still Burning: A play developed from the words of former Black Panther Party members: Billy X Jennings, Cyrus Keller and their descendants, Eisa Davis, Teshaga Hagopian, Amaya Keller, Jafre Keller, and Catherine Newman.

Special thanks to Mr. J. Ream.

One direct quote from Huey P. Newton from Berkeley in the Sixties, Producer/Director: Mark Titchfield, California Newsreel 1990 116 minutes.


