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THEATER REVIEW

His voice rings true in moving, funny 'Genuine'

■ A vibrant charge of original talent slices through "Not a Genuine Black Man" at the newly inaugurated Hayworth on Wilshire.

By David C. Nichols, Special to The Times

A vibrant charge of original talent slices through "Not a Genuine Black Man" at the newly inaugurated Hayworth. This compelling personal reverie on being black in America, by way of San Leandro, is a quiet triumph for author-performer Brian Copeland.

Those who know Bay Area fixture Copeland only as a radio host and stand-up may be surprised. The show's title comes from a heckling radio caller, and its implications spur an identity quest that underpins two airtight acts of recollections.

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Copeland's stream-of-consciousness narrative is two-sided. One half recalls the 1970s, when his mother, Carolyn, packed up her family to escape her abusive husband, Sylvester.

As Copeland dryly notes, "In 1972, the National Committee against Discrimination in Housing called San Leandro, California, 'a racist bastion of white supremacy.' CBS News and Newsweek magazine covered the story. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conducted hearings. And then, we moved to town."

Copeland, his reedy quality pitched directly between Bill Cosby and Terrence Howard, moves through memories and the moment as easily as switching dials. His restrained technique is laudable, keeping focus between parents, grandmother, kid sister, the neighborhood and his 8-year-old self with sentiment, hilarity and grit.

Moreover, the pin-drop silences elicited by Copeland's depictions of violence and bigotry indicate a sage social observer, ably aided by director David Ford and lighting designer David Hines.

When the other thread — successful adult Copeland isn't coping — revs up in Act 2, the



Comedian Brian Copeland (Robert Altman)

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uncovered layers are ineffably moving.

Copeland's ability to captivate an audience rivals many a celebrated solo predecessor, from Ruth Draper to Spalding Gray to Whoopi Goldberg.

This aspect, coupled with the clear-eyed view of racial realities, propels "Not a Genuine Black Man," because Copeland is a genuine discovery.

'Not a Genuine Black Man'

Where: Hayworth, 2511 Wilshire Blvd., L.A.

When: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays

Ends: April 1

Price: \$20

Contact: (800) 838-3006 or www.brownpapertickets.com

Running time: 2 hours

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