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by Wanda Sabir

'Not a Genuine Black Man'

Brian Copeland's "Not a Genuine Black Man" has been extended again through Jan. 29 at the Marsh, 1062 Valencia St., near 22nd Street, San Francisco, (415) 641-0235. Tickets are \$15-\$22, Thursday-Saturday 8:30, Sundays at 5 p.m.

That San Francisco's longest running solo performance is about a Black man talking about what it means to grow up in one of the most racist suburbs in the county, San Leandro, in a hardworking, woman-headed household - mother and grandmother and a dad who messed up too many times to be a permanent fixture in anyone's life - is testament to Copeland's compelling story and humor, the kind of humor that makes one happy she's sitting down when the fast moving saga hits those snags that catch in one's throat like the horror all too common on TV these days. Fortunately, Copeland has distance and perspective with which to gage his ocean, a depth he's bottomed out in, yet somehow floated to the top as his audience does with him when the show concludes.

As Copeland tells it, being a Black man, especially the variety he subscribes to, has society often at odds with the boxes he checks or those it places him in - sometimes the brother can't win for losing, literally. What does a man do when his identity is constantly under evaluation?

Perhaps this is the appeal of "Not a Genuine Black Man": audiences are able to get an inside scoop on a tip not often explored in most circles. How does one ask the token brother in the coffee room for the scoop on the Black male phenomenon? It drives Copeland a little wacky after he is a huge success, has it all yet can't find himself.

It is here that all Black men with Big Mamas at home send her rose-colored thoughts of appreciation. Grandmothers have a way of helping grandsons sort the wheat from the chaff, and Copeland's help him find a way out of the depression that is not supposed to affect Black people, let alone Black men.

Hell, authenticity is hard work!

In a fast moving, well-written, excellently directed and performed work, Copeland's "Not a Genuine Black Man" is worthy of all the accolades and then some. It's no wonder it's been optioned for a book, and I heard film or TV options are also being explored.

He performs all the characters - mother, siblings, racist neighbors - and the boy who grows into a genuine Black man.

February is almost upon us and with it too many choices for a month which should be at least a year, the way the United Nations dedicated each year for a certain population or cause. Why not name a year for African Diaspora History, and then we wouldn't have to rush and cram everything into the shortest month of the year.

From All Paths of Life: Poetry of the Vietnam War Era and Its Legacy

This Friday, in conjunction with the Oakland Museum's "What's Going On? California and the Vietnam War," Maxine Hong Kingston's veterans writers group, Rafael Jesus Gonzalez, Jewelle Gomez and Le Pham Le, will read poetry, 7-8:30 p.m. Call (510) 238-2200 or visit www.museumca.org. The OM is located at 1000 Oak St., Oakland, near the Lake Merritt BART Station. General admission is \$8 and \$5. There is a special surcharge for admission to the Vietnam exhibit. The OM is open until 9 p.m. on first Fridays and is free on second Sundays (except the Vietnam exhibit).

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