

One-man show features life of multitalented Paul Robeson

By **AYESHA MORRIS**
Daily News Staff

His rumbling bass voice immediately called the ear to attention. His larger than life stage presence embodied a sense of collective black manhood in fresh, dignified roles. The life and times of the quintessential Renaissance man Paul Robeson — a renowned actor, activist, lawyer and athlete — will be portrayed on stage at the University of the Virgin Islands Little Theater at 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

The one-man show, "The World is My Home: The Life & Times of Paul Robeson" stars writer and actor-director Stogie Amir Kenyatta, and is presented by UVI's Student Government Association Black Heritage Committee.

Tracing Robeson's life from age 5 in New Jersey to the ripened age of 70 as he fought against being blacklisted, Kenyatta plays 10 characters on stage, including Robeson's father, wife and brother.

At the start of the play, Robeson's father, at age 15, escapes slavery on Harriet Tubman's underground railroad.

Donning five wardrobe changes, injecting humor and a comprehensive approach to Robeson's social and professional life, Kenyatta pays tribute to one of the most important figures of the 20th century.

Robeson's excellence in whatever he did attracted the opposite sex. "He was approached a lot. He was brilliant, speaking many languages including French, German and Italian, and played pro ball," Kenyatta said. "A guy like that would be a catch. He's a hell of a catch."

Robeson fought for human rights in America and the world throughout his career.

The third black person to attend Rutgers University, he was valedictorian of his class.

He starred as Othello in the longest-running Shakespeare play in Broadway history. In 1936, he portrayed Haitian leader Toussaint L'Ouverture in a play by Caribbean author C.L.R. James.

Socially active, Robeson co-founded the Organization of African Unity, spoke out against the Holocaust and visited the Warsaw ghetto in Poland.

Robeson's legacy includes surpassing the odds at a time when lynchings were rampant in America and blacks "were fighting just to ride on the back of the bus," Kenyatta said.

"With perseverance and excellence you can pretty much overcome any adversity," Kenyatta said. "He excelled in sports, in law, in entertainment and in politics,



Stogie Amir Kenyatta portrays the life of Paul Robeson.

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four of the most prominent arenas through which African-Americans have received prestige.”

Robeson brought a sense of dignity and purpose to the stage, where blacks were commonly portrayed in step-and-fetch-it roles, opening the door for others to follow.

“You can't out-think, out-fight or out-run him,” Kenyatta said. “It was an amazing achievement to show we're greater than those who've been oppressing us for so long.”

The show features music from Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Fats Waller, Cab Calloway and Robeson.

Kenyatta has presented “The Life & Times of Paul Robeson” at more than 195 colleges and universities, including the University of the West Indies Cave Hill campus. He is also taking the production to cultural centers around the world.

A classically trained actor, Kenyatta studied at the Afro American Studio in Harlem, the



Stogie Amir Kenyatta

Henry Street Settlement Theatre and Al Fann Theatrical Ensemble. He appeared in the TV series “The Bernie Mac Show,” “J.A.G.” and “E.R.”

He has written several screenplays, two of which he would like to direct and act in.

Tickets are \$5 for students, \$7 for UVI faculty and staff and \$10 for the general public; available at Modern Music, V.I. Bridal & Tuxedo and UVI Bookstore. For more information call 693-1550 or visit www.stogiekenyatta.com.

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