

Passing the Torch Through the Arts

For Immediate Release

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Passing the Torch Through the Arts will be reaching back to the entertainment days of yesteryear when it presents a staged reading of Brian Petti's new play *nobody* on July 12th. All the way back to Vaudeville, in fact, and it couldn't be more appropriate.

After all, this is the group's maiden effort at the Howland Cultural Center at 477 Main St in Beacon, so what better place to start than at the beginning?

Petti's original play with music, which takes place in and around the black theater scene at the turn of the century, will kick off Passing the Torch's New Playwright's Lab on Sunday July 12th from 5:30 to 7:30. It is the first in what will become a regular Sunday night venue for playwrights, actors and directors to polish, hone, and perfect their work. The reading is free to the public, although donations are accepted.

nobody tells the story of Bert Williams, the first black entertainment superstar in America. It traces his beginnings as part of a Vaudeville team with George Walker through his career as the only black performer in Zeigfeld's Follies. Throughout the story, issues of personal identity and racial identification are explored, as this Negro performer of West-Indian descent becomes famous portraying a Southern-Negro racial stereotype while in blackface.

With humor and pathos, *nobody* explores the price of fame, the struggle for racial equality in America at the turn of the century, and the dangers of moral ambiguity, all through the character of one man. Former Newburgh resident Mary Ellen Nelligar will direct a talented cast that includes Nick Butler of New Windsor in the title role, and Michael Monasterial of Kingston as his troubled partner George Walker. Musical accompaniment will be provided by well-known local musician Joel Flowers.

Brian Petti (formerly of Newburgh) has been produced in numerous Off-Off Broadway houses, most notably *Masquerade* at Cherry Lane Theatre. He was also the winner of the Humboldt State University National Play Contest in California for *Next Year in Jerusalem*. Local productions include *Hindenburg—the Musical* (with Joel Flowers), *Masquerade* (New Windsor), *Next Year in Jerusalem*, *Everything's Coming Up Roses*, *The Measure of a Man* (Poughkeepsie) and *On the Expectation of White Chistmas* (Hudson).

Passing the Torch Through the Arts is a multi-ethnic, community based theater company, dedicated to education and social change. Our program is designed to serve at-risk youth in an innovative and completely interactive theater project. We believe the Hudson Valley is a treasure trove of talent: writers, actors, directors and we would love to help

them perfect their craft or just keep their chops, close to home and without the expense of NYC. We are looking forward to offering a venue and peer critique of new plays and plays in progress from all levels, all ages, all unique voices of Hudson Valley playwrights, all in a nurturing environment. Also, we encourage the general public to come and view the works to enjoy the creative process.

So come join us at the beginning. Dancing with a hat and cane is optional. Being entertained is not!