

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

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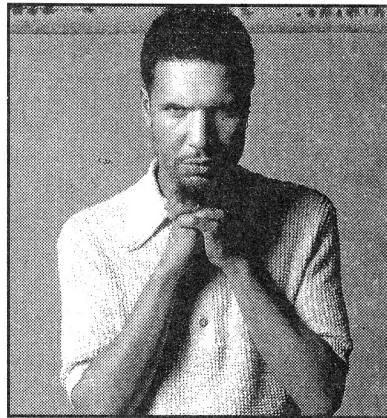
THEATER REVIEW

1-man show keeps a versatile star's talent hip-hopping

The Gathering: A Hip-Hop Theatre Journey to the Meeting Places of Black Men

★★★★★ **Who:** Will Power.
Where: The
Phoenix Underground, 749 N. Park Ave.
When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Fri-
day and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday.
Tickets: \$20; \$10 ages 24 and under.
Call (317) 635-PLAY.

Star ratings: ★★★★★ excellent, ★★★ good, ★★ fair, ★ poor



Submitted Photo

By Marion Garmel
STAFF WRITER

He's only here for one more weekend, so head right over to the Phoenix Underground. You don't want to miss Will Power and his one-man theater piece, *The Gathering: A Hip-Hop Theatre Journey to the Meeting Places of Black Men*.

He is, in a word, awesome.

Power is the actor, writer and musician who grew up in the Fillmore District of San Francisco, lucked into a neighborhood theater program, and put his talents to work in the emerging hip-hop movement, becoming a rhythm and theater specialist.

This show, his most ambitious, is totally unexpected. But the man can play any part, whether it's a person or musical instrument.

A tall drink of water with arms and legs that fly like the wind, he simply twirls around or changes a jacket and moves from one character to another, never missing a beat.

Does it all: Actor-writer-director Will Power shows he has any character or instrument down in *The Gathering*.

The "gathering places of black men" he celebrates in four set pieces are: the jam session, the neighborhood barbershop, the street and the basketball court.

Whether he's impersonating old-time jazzmen telling rappers to "keep the music alive," or playing all the members of a basketball team, each with a different rhythm and beat, he's impressive.

He can be a drummer using nothing but his hands and his tongue: "T-t-t-jazz, t-t-t-jazz. Young rapper, you be sure you make hip-hop the one music we don't lose."

It comes in a lament of old men who admit that, even though they made the records and sometimes wrote the songs, they didn't read the contracts before they signed. Everything, sooner or later, was taken away from them.

Just as impressive is the bass player and the saxophonist. Power can do just about anything with his voice.

The barbershop sketch, which is about the importance of having a place you can call home to discuss your differences, includes a Bible-thumping reverend and a gay black man. Neither fully accepts the other, but they part with civility.

Thanks to a little kid who screams when he has to get his hair cut, this sketch has some

comic relief. Not so the street scene, which begins with a young punk telling how he became a "big man" by learning to shoot drugs and people.

Lying in the gutter, he's visited by three ghosts (shades of *A Christmas Carol*), warning him of what can happen if he doesn't mend his ways.

One is his best friend, who died in a shootout and wants to save his friend the same outcome. "I was there for you in life and I am there for you in death. Let that s- -t go. I don't want to see you be like me."

Most impressive, visually, is the older brother who died in prison, with Power standing behind prison bars created from light and shadow.

But most devastating is the boy's father, trying to explain how he thought he was building a better world for his son by marching and protesting and fighting for peace and justice, only to find his neighborhood poorer and worse off than it was the decade before. He finds his peace in the needle.

Power blends beat and rhythm and poetry into his presentation, but not all of it is rapping. Some of it is just plain syncopated speech. But be warned: Some of the patter is rife with four-letter words.

That is not what makes the show work, however. What makes it work is the way the actor can turn his body and voice, his arms and legs, into something so unexpected you simply watch in delight.

This is like being in on the beginning of something special.

The Gathering was seen at last Thursday's preview, and the Marion County Health Department was conducting free, anonymous testing for HIV and AIDS after the performance.

This is a part of the theater's community outreach program. The service is offered after each Friday and Saturday performance. Presentation of *The Gathering* is part of the Urban Experience Series sponsored by Mays Chemical Co.

Contact Marion Garmel
at (317) 444-6078 or via e-mail
at marion.garmel@starnews.com