

examiner.com

One man show about the Chicago Native Jazz performer Oscar Brown Jr.



Morris Gearing



Catherine Hood
Chicago Community Journalism
Examiner

August 5, 2013

Singer, dancer, actor, storyteller, Morris Gearing's production of "Something about Oscar Brown Jr." had its 38th showing at The Jazz Showcase in Chicago. The spectacular one man tribute, starring Gearing, performed the famed singer, Oscar Brown Jr.'s popular songs "The Snake", "Signifying Monkey", and "Hazel's Hips". Through the mixture of excellent vocals of Gearing, Brown's iconic lyrics, piano, bass guitar and drums, the show takes you on a roller coaster of emotions dipping you back into the 1960s and 1970s where racism was the issue plaguing the African American

communities.

Raised and born on the southside of Chicago, Oscar Brown Jr., wrote over 1,000 songs, produced twelve albums, performed in a dozen musicals and served as a civil rights activist. As an actor he performed his songs through the portrayal of different characters and story telling. As a songwriter he wrote about life, addressing the peaks and valleys of the existence African Americans faced during the Civil Rights Movement era.

"Oscar's voice and his style suited me. His way of storytelling appealed to me. It's like any

piece of art you begin to work with it then it begins to work with you. We want to keep the show authentic. Not with the intention to copy Oscar but to find myself within Oscar Brown” Morris Gearing expressed during an interview at the show Wednesday night. Gearing spoke of meeting Oscar brown Jr. and being trained under the master performer in the hopes of maintaining the musical history and legacy through this production.

The show seeks to capture audiences in glimpses and emotions from moments in the music then actively engages the audience to participate in singing along to some of the tunes and catch phrases. Morris Gearing does a great job vocally and has a distinctive voice that combines jazz, opera, and the blues. It is in his vocal performance that Gearing shines the most as his voice is perfectly suited to sing Browns’ lyrics. In between musical numbers, Gearing recounts story of how Oscar made each song and who Oscar really was.

The Chicago production run continues to grow and recently had its largest turnout at the Jazz Showcase. In a extra special moment, Maggie Brown, Oscar Brown Jr.’s daughter, took the stage and sung “Summer in the City”, a song Oscar wrote in New York. Another surprising audience member was the daughter of Hazel from the song “Hazel Hips” which was about a waitress Oscar Brown Jr. admired.

Calvin "Koco " Brunson the musical director for Brown’s original productions, returns on Gearing’s production as the pianist. Drummer Kwawme “Steve Cobb” and bass player Ted Brewer also shared experiences with Oscar Brown Jr. displaying how much a labor of love, authenticity and tribute the whole production represents. Goodman Theatre director, Chuck Smith, is the director of the show and is working with Morris on blocking and development towards the goal of taking the show to Broadway.

To learn more about the production run of “Something about Oscar Brown Jr.” please contact them at mnglhm@aol.com and also check out Morris Gearing's live performance on [youtube](#).

