

# The Sanford Herald

To inform, challenge and celebrate

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## REVIEW: Powerful show doesn't gloss over the truth

by BILLY LIGGETT

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A few more like these, and I'm going to request that all Temple Theatre productions be reduced to one- or two-man shows.

On the heels of the well-received "Stones in His Pockets" earlier this season, "Blood Done Sign My Name" — the one-man production written for the stage and performed by Durham actor Mike Wiley — began its six-show run at Temple Theatre Friday night. The play takes the critically acclaimed book by North Carolina native Tim Tyson — it's about Tyson's account of the 1970 murder of Henry Barrow and the movement that emerged when Barrow's alleged murderers were acquitted — and focuses more on the interviews Tyson conducted for the term paper that preceded the book.

On a dark stage that includes little more than a barber's chair, a church pew, a bar stool and a TV screen that helps the audience keep up with character changes, Wiley slides in and out of each role effortlessly.

One minute, he's a 10-year-old Tyson ... the next, he's Tyson's father, the Rev. Vernon Tyson, the white minister who tried to "keep the peace" in the town of Oxford after the murder tore it apart. Wiley also takes on the roles of Barrow's cousin, who witnessed the murder; Golden Frinks, the civil rights leader who led the marches to Raleigh; and both Robert and Larry Teel, the father and son accused of the murder.

His only help comes in the form of Mary D. Williams, a real-life friend of Tyson's who almost steals the show with her powerful "freedom songs;" her a capella gospel left the crowd speechless on more than one occasion.

Wiley's production, like the book, looks to challenge the audience more than it does to satisfy it. In real life, Barrow's murder got the ball rolling in breaking down racial barriers in Oxford, but it wasn't an immediate process (some barriers still exist); and "Blood Done Sign My Name" doesn't leave you with the "happy ending" you may be longing for.

Some may feel uncomfortable holding hands with other audience members and joining in a freedom song or chanting along with Wiley ... but he's making a point. White people who feel uneasy calling out "black power" will realize how Vernon Tyson felt when he did the same during those marches.

And others may be put off by the use of the "n-word" and other cutting language not intended for innocent ears.

But without all of this, "Blood Done Sign My Name" wouldn't feel as real. Tyson and Wiley met with these characters in real life, and these were their words.

The truth isn't glossed over, as Wiley said in the post-production Q&A with the audience (which I recommend you stick around for). The lack of a tightly wound happy ending, the uneasiness, the language, the hatred ... this was the truth.

Watching Wiley is akin to watching history unfold, and his performance is one of the best the Temple has seen in years. And his goal of invoking thought from his audience is achieved.

## COMMUNITY READING

Lee County Library is planning a reception/community reading for "Blood Done Sign My name" following the final matinee on Feb. 7. It will also have a table set up in the library with information about the show and extra copies of the novel. For more information, call Jennifer at (919) 718-4665, Ext. 5483.

## ONE BY ONE

Following this Sunday's 2 p.m. matinee, the group One By One will host a reception at the theater. The group, whose goal is to "improve race relations ... within and outside of this community for the betterment of all" is also paying to send 50 local children to see the two matinees. For more information, call Susan at (919) 776-4576.

## SPONSOR

Wilson & Reives, Attorneys at Law, are the primary sponsor for the current Temple production. Several local book clubs have also contributed financially to the show.

## ONLINE

For more information on Mike Wiley, visit his Web site at [www.mikewileyproductions.com](http://www.mikewileyproductions.com). For more information on the film, visit [IMDB.com](http://IMDB.com) and search "Blood Done Sign My Name."

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« [Carolbearlson wrote on Sunday, Jan 31 at 05:44 AM](#) »

We saw this production at Duke and plan on seeing it today, weather permitting. It is not to be missed and the Temple should be praised for bringing such an important production to Sanford.

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