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**THE KANSAS CITY STAR**

Kansas City, MO

February 28, 2010

### *Review / 'Porgy and Bess'*

By JOHN HEUERTZ

Here's a can't-miss story line: Dope fiends solve personal problems by killing people. Here's another one: Love transforms people, and frees them. One could argue that both are supported by the Gershwin brothers' 1935 operatic masterpiece "Porgy and Bess," performed this weekend at Johnson County Community College. Considered America's greatest 20th century opera -- and also criticized for its view of black American life -- Porgy admits that neither human good nor evil is permanent. This honesty is a source of its greatness. George Gershwin also poured himself, body and soul, into writing some of his best music for the show -- including "Summertime," "I Got Plenty Of Nuttin'," and "It Ain't Necessarily So." To summarize: Bess is with Crown, who kills Robbins and flees after losing a craps game. Only the crippled beggar Porgy offers Bess shelter from the police. Soon, their love transforms them. But Sportin' Life tries to lure Bess away from Porgy with cocaine and tales of New York. Crown later returns to reclaim Bess and shortly thereafter Porgy kills him. Sportin' Life forces cocaine on Bess and leaves some with her. The police jail Porgy for a week. When he returns, Porgy learns that Bess has gone to New York with Sportin' Life, and sets out to find her there. Leonard Rowe's Porgy and Tomas Elliott's Crown were properly operatic, while Donita Volkwijn's Bess was musically if not theatrically satisfying. Reggie Whitehead's Sportin' Life was more Merry Prankster than serious bad guy; his fluid, rubbery stage presence was most enjoyable. Stephanie Beadle's Maria mixed comic relief with a fine contralto voice. But soprano Reyna Carguill as Serena commanded the stage most successfully. Serena has none of the best songs in the show, but Carguill sang what she had with unmistakable power, authority and passion.