

## Go With The Flo

# Usher headed for the alter?

TONGUES are wagging that Usher will marry his pregnant fiancée, Tameka Foster, on Saturday, July 28 at Antonio "L.A." Reid's estate in the Hamptons. Sources say the loving couple has been calling celeb friends of theirs like Jay-Z and Beyonce and Janet Jackson and Jermaine Dupri to attend the nuptials. The question on the tip of everyone's tongue is: "Will Usher's mom, Jonetta Patton, be in attendance?"

Usher fired his mother as his manager shortly after he and Tameka, who Ms. Patton had fired as his stylist, became engaged. This is the pop star's first marriage and the second for Tameka. She has three children from her first marriage.

SINCE we're chatting about young love, rumor has it the hottest couple in the Hamptons recently was supermodel-turned-television-mogul Tyra Banks and investment banker John Utendahl, whose compa-

ny hits the Black Enterprise Top 100 List every year with an estimated wealth well over \$100 million. The two attended American Express CEO Ken Chenault and his wife, Kathy's posh party.

HOT couple Eddie Murphy and Tracey Edmonds were

among the stars who came out Saturday night in support of DesignCare 2007, an annual fundraiser from the HollyRod Foundation to benefit adults and children battling debilitating diseases and life circumstances. Actress Holly Robinson Peete and her husband, retired NFL quarterback and "Best Damn Sports Show Period" co-host Rodney Peete, celebrated the ninth popular fundraiser, hosting a star-studded couture fashion show, an electrifying musical performance, and both live and silent auctions at a beautiful private residence in Malibu. The Hol-



Florence Anthony

Jenny McCarthy, Angie Harmon and Jason Sehorn, Gayle King, Quincy Jones and Sanaa Lathan.

HARLEM Week kicks off its 33rd anniversary by honoring the multicultural community with a variety of spectacular events and activities during its Great Day in Harlem festival. The four-part, day-long celebration kicks off with the annual Family Unity Day Cultural Festival, the spiritually uplifting "Gospel Caravan," international "Fashion Fusion" fashion show, and ends with an enchanting Concert Under the Stars cele-

bratign the musical legacies of James Brown and Ruth Brown. The outdoor free concerts will feature performances by the legendary Harold Melvin's Blue Notes, R&B singer Miki Howard, gospel legend Hezekiah Walker, Gospel Prince of Praise, Byron Cage and a host of surprise appearances.

LAWYERS for the Amaru Entertainment and Afeni Shakur, co-administrator of the Tupac Shakur estate, filed for an injunction against Death Row Records, Inc. and R. Todd Nelson, as Chapter 11 Trustee, to prohibit the

inclusion of Tupac Shakur's unreleased tracks, compositions or sound recordings in the auction of Death Row Records. The adversary complaint was filed in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California in Los Angeles. The injunction sought to restrain the sale of certain assets belonging to the Tupac estate, which are being touted as part of the Death Row Records bankruptcy assets. At the time of his death, Tupac had recorded approximately 152 unreleased songs, which remained in the vaults of Death Row Records.

## Sekou Sundiata farewell

Sekou Sundiata, who was born Robert Franklin Feaster, died on July 18, 2007. Born and raised in Harlem, he was 59.

Sekou was a profound keeper of the Harlem cultural flame that spread across the United States. As a prolific poet, recording artist, performance writer, author, and performer, his reputation always preceded him.

Poets are similar to musicians, it's a feeling that ignites your entire being, you pick up that pen and bam! the words start flowing and behold they even rhyme, it's a gift and Sekou was blessed. Upon meeting him for the first time you may not have known what he did but his aura perpetuated a glow making it apparent that he was someone you needed to know.

He was cool like a summer breeze with a warm bright smile that would elevate you to brighter moments. That was his magic coming from within, a positive spirit of honesty and truth. His rhythmic words have the intensity of a John Coltrane solo, dancing with Sly Stone funk, and touching the soul like a Miles Davis ballad.

Sekou was Malcolm X and Langston Hughes. Some of his poems hit like rapid torpedoes piercing the brain with revolutionary thought, and others were simple but deep as the Euphrates River.

"It was an ever learning experience working with Sekou and knowing him as a brother," stated Craig Harris, trombonist, composer, and

performance artist. Harris and Sekou worked on a number of projects including the two CD's "The Blue Oneness of Dreams," nominated for a Grammy Award, and "Longstoryshort."

Both of these recordings combined the sounds of blues, funk, jazz, African and Afro-Caribbean percussion.

During the early 1970s the City College of New York was still in revolutionary mode and Sekou was one of its prime activists. We crossed paths at one of the many parties held every weekend in one of the brownstones/apartment buildings surrounding the campus. The spacious apartments were overflowing with young Blacks holding the keys to their future. The hardcore funk of James Brown was blasting in one room, and in another brothers kept the motherland alive with their melodic conga playing.

When the congas came to a whisper, it was time for poetry, and suddenly James Brown was silenced, the only sound was the smooth voice of Sekou. He stood tall and proud, his words filled the room taking us on an unforgettable journey that will last a lifetime.

A commemorative celebration of Sekou Sundiata's life and work is scheduled for August 22, his birthday, at Brooklyn Academy of Music's Opera House. The family requests that donations be made in the name of Sekou Sundiata to the New York Organ Donor Network or to the National Kidney Foundation.

## Prelude caps off another stellar season

Prelude to Performance, under the auspices of the Martina Arroyo Foundation, concluded its third season with productions of Mozart's "Cosi fan tutte" and Offenbach's "Les Contes d'Hoffmann" at Aaron Davis Hall from last Thursday through Sunday. Because they were double-cast, and time was limited, I chose to only attend the first half of each of the performances.

The brilliant collaborative efforts of conductor Willie Anthony Waters and stage director Ellen Rievman helped the young singers meet the challenges of "Cosi" with great success at both the Thursday and Sunday performances. The arias and recitatives were sung beautifully and the difficult ensembles were executed with considerable precision. The acting was also on a high, professional level.

The singers included Taylor Stayton and Phandulwazi Maseti (Ferrando), Joseph Flaxman and Daniel Lee (Guglielmo), Anthony Russell (Don Alfonso), Rachel Sliker and Lillian Roberts (Fiordiligi), **Leandra Ramon** and Allison Robertson (Dorabella) and Nina Riley and Alexis Pomierski (Despina). Each of the artists received individual ovations for their arias and the ensembles were rewarded with much applause.

Through some kind of theatrical magic, conductor Steven Crawford and stage director Laura Alley were able to make "Les Contes d'Hoffmann" work in a small space and without a large chorus to people the stage when needed. On both Friday and Sunday, I was impressed



by the singing and dramatic skills of the artists. Throughout the performances, individual singers were rewarded with ovations after their principal arias.

The principals included Jonathan Matthews and Choong Lee (Hoffmann), Martina Chylikova and Aleksandra Lukowski (Nicklausse), Samatha Mowery and Yelena Lewenson (Olympia), Lauren Sangwon Woo and Jee-eun Hong (Antonia), Basia Revi and Cynthia Leigh Karp (Giulietta) and John Dominick III and Eui-Jin Kim (Coppelius/Miracle/Dapertutto).

The chorus and other singers in smaller roles were quite good, too.

Special mention must be

given to the excellent playing by the orchestra, which consisted of young players. The sets were quite simple, but effective. Charles Caine's costume designs were exceptionally beautiful, as well as the excellent wig and makeup designs by Steven Horak and fine lighting design by Geoffrey Neal Krogh. At all performances, the audience response was enthusiastic.

This observer was especially impressed with the choice of works presented this season. Both librettos were extremely well written, giving much pleasure to all concerned. The one for "Cosi" was by Lorenzo daPonte and the "Hoffmann" by Barbier, and Carre was a skillful adaptation of the stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann. The latter were partially autobiographical, giving insight into the mind of a Romantic genius.

The Prelude to Performance project itself is quite remarkable. Each year, a group of highly talented, young singers are assembled to participate in a unique, six-week program in which they study one role in depth. This culminates in a complete performance of that particular opera with orchestra, costumes and stage sets. The concluding performances also offer a chance for the public to experience opera at moderate prices.

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