

## Amiri Baraka is taking it to the streets

Clifton Joseph

For activist poet/essayist/dramatist/novelist Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) poetry as performance — the poet takes his message 'out there' where the public is — remains the highest and most important expression of the art form. In Toronto recently to film segments of filmmaker Ron Mann's look at avant-garde poetry, the "long-distance singer and would-be dancer" as he calls himself, spoke to *Excalibur* about his work and ideas. "The origins of poetry have to do with song," Baraka intones. "I think speech comes first but poetry has always been a form of musical speech. Too often though, Western bourgeois poetry has been oriented around the page only and much of it passes away into the dust without ever being read."

Baraka, one of the leading voices of the Beat poets



Sally Hutchinson

Amiri Baraka takes his message to the people.

the 1950s, (a movement that included Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufmann, Robert Creeley and others) is noted for his many volumes of poetry including *The Dead Lecturer*. His novelistic achievements include *A System of Dante's Hell* and *Tales, Blues, People* and *Black Music* established him as a leading authority on the music of Afro-America, and his dramatic works, especially *Dutchman* and *The Slave* have further propelled him into prominence. On his third and latest album of poetry he is assisted by jazz avant-gardists David Murray on saxophone and Steve McCall on drums.

Baraka identifies the 1960s as the time when he started making sure his poetry was heard. "Afro-American poets in the 60's began to deal with the oral tradition basically because we wanted to take poetry out of the academies and make it reach the people. We knew," he adds, "that the people needed the poetry and the poetry needed the people, and that contact with the people would make the poetry stronger."

"In the 70s, the Publishers have tried to de-emphasize the literature that deals with the real life situations and struggles of people's lives," he says. "They have preferred to publish a literature that suggests that whatever is wrong with society nobody can ever find out. They have tried to eliminate the 60s, just like in the 50s they tried to eliminate the writers of the 30s with the literary McCarthyism of the New Criticism."

Asked about the politics of Black America in the face of supply-side Reaganomics, renewed Ku Klux Klan violence and the radical conservatism of the Moral Majority, his answer is quick and sharp: "The majority of Black America is hostile to Reagan. And the question on the mouths of these people is self-determination — how can we get what we need — I think," he goes on, "that the 80s, 90s, and into the 21st century, the articulation of the Concept and struggle for self-determination will be the order of the day. That is going to be the theme song of the majority of Black organizations and mass movements in America."

## Cortez's writing was spawned in the 60's

"In terms of working with a band, it's the use of a call and response pattern," she continued. "I'm making comments on the world, and they are making musical comments on my words, and I'm making comments on their comments, and we build and intensify this feeling and attitude."

Cortez's writing was spawned in the waters of America's tumultuous sixties. The poetry of Black America was uncompromisingly black, was radically iconoclastic in its form, and used the rhythms and emotions of the Black community as

subject matter. Its focus was on social change. Many of the poets were women, fueled by a renewed woman's movement. As a group they burgeoned into a notable force that shaped Black literature in the Seventies.

"I really think that women dominated the Seventies," agrees Cortez. "People like Paule Marshall, Rosa Guy, Sonia Sanchez, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and many other were all very active. The Seventies was a time when women were again finding out about themselves and becoming more aggressive, and there were

more occupations for women." Cortez pauses, "It was a time for redefinition. Many women entered the creative arts as a viable means of both expression and employment. It was a creatively active period."

Cortez's creative voice has placed her in the ranks of the top avant garde poets such as Amiri Baraka, Gil Scott-Heron, and Linton Kwesi Johnson who have all fashioned an alternative form of poetry in which life, politics, art, words, and music are all merged into a consummate expression and affirmation of the human spirit.

# H AIR

\*\*\*\*\* January 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 \*\*\*\*\*

Showtime 8:00pm  
(Note 2pm matinee Jan. 29th)

Admission: \$3.00 students  
\$4.00 others

**PURCHASE YOUR  
TICKETS NOW AT**

**SOUNDPROOF  
RECORDS GYST**

\*\*\* and receive 20% OFF the album. \*\*\*

## Paul's FRENCH FOOD SHOPS and Catering Service

Open daily

7:30 a.m. til' 6:00 p.m.  
Luncheon Special

Now open for Dinner

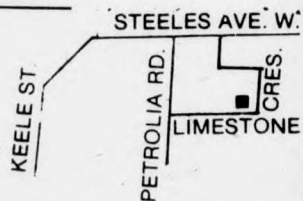
Thursday thru Saturday  
5 p.m. til' 10 p.m.

An invitation to dining pleasure...

Savour our Fine Beef Medallion,  
our Delightful Chicken Supreme  
and Truly Exquisite Veal.  
After your meal Select from a  
Rich Collection of Superb Desserts.

Home Catering for All Occasions

115 Limestone Crescent, Downsview, Ontario  
Tel. 661-0589, 661-9070



**1/2 Price  
SALE**

**JAN. 21 - 22- 23**  
**SELECTED GROUPS**

Bras  
Lingerie  
Swimwear  
Hose, Slips  
Hostess Gowns  
Sexy Baby Dolls

WHILE QUANTITIES LAST

**All Things Nice**

*'our concern is your femininity'*

LINGERIE • BRAS • HOSE  
SWIMWEAR • DAYWEAR

Shoppers World Albion • 741-2377

## NOTICE TO ALL FACULTY OF ARTS' STUDENTS

Have you moved since enrolling  
in courses?

Do we have your correct mailing  
(local) address?

Mail with incorrect addresses is being returned to the Office of Student Programmes in large numbers. There will be a mailing with important enrolment information in February and no mail will be sent to addresses which have proven incorrect.

To inform the Office of Student Programmes of your correct address you may come to S302 Ross Bldg. or you may advise us in writing.