

Nairobi community project

Soul festival launches cultural center

By PAUL EMERSON
The artistic expressions of the area's black community will receive new impetus Sun-

day with the formal opening of the Nairobi Cultural Center in East Palo Alto. Launching of the new cen-

ter, located in a converted seven-room home at 1590 Bay Road, will be ushered in with the "Nairobi Soul Festival"—a program of black music, dance, drama, poetry and art.

Along with the opening of the cultural center will be the introduction of several new businesses in the Nairobi Village Shopping Center (formerly Littleman's) a block away at Bay Road and University Avenue.

Entertainment, soul food and games will be offered at the shopping center Sunday afternoon as well.

One of the featured attractions at the soul festival will be a performance by the Habari Nairobi Dance Troupe. This group consists of three

conga drummers, two percussion players, six dancers and a young black woman who recites her poetry to the sound of the drums.

Co-sponsoring the festival is the Black Business Coalition, which has been instrumental in developing the Nairobi Village Shopping Center, or Nairobi Mall, as it is frequently called, as a completely black-owned complex.

Among the art works on display at the festival Sunday will be paintings and graphics by Clarence Williams, director of the Nairobi Cultural Center, and black-and-white prints by Palo Alto photographer Lee Reeves.

Another major attraction of the festival, according to Williams, will be an appearance by the cast of "Big Time Buck White," the black power musical playing in San Francisco. These actors plan a program of poetry, music and singing.

Williams said there's also a chance the well-known black playwright and composer Oscar Brown Jr. may appear at the festival.

The festival will begin at 1 p.m. and run until 8 or 9 o'clock. There will be no admission charge. "Soul Food" and the art displays will be sold, with proceeds going to support the center, Williams said.

The house in which the cultural center is located was badly run down and in disarray when Williams and his staff took over the building last January.

The house has been repainted on the outside (an eye-catching rust color) and all the rooms within have been redecorated, including the big garage in the rear which has been turned into a wildly designed musical rumpus room.

In the rear of the property, a large open-air stage has been constructed around a giant spreading, 70-year-old oak tree. This will be the site for many of the soul festival performances Sunday afternoon.

The art works will be displayed in the various rooms throughout the building, and the food counter will be placed in a large enclosed cement patio between the house and the garage in the rear.

Assisting Williams in developing the center have been his wife, Barbara; Judson Singer,

22, a musician; Beverly Richards, a 16-year-old Palo Alto High student; Nathan Robinson, 31, music director, and Ricky Wilson, 19, dance director.

In addition, many others have volunteered scores of hours in helping refurbish the building and getting it ready for Sunday's grand opening.

"We wanted to put all our energies and talent into developing something for the black community," Williams said. "But we're not just aiming at the black community. We're hoping the white community, too, will be interested in what we're doing, what we've got to say and will come in and have a look."

The cultural center will work closely with the East Palo Alto Day School, Nairobi High School and College and the various Black Student Union groups in the area.

Classes in the arts and crafts are planned at the center. A library and tape room also is being developed, along with a photo lab and motion picture project. Music, drama and education programs round out the projected offerings.

The cultural center is in need of financial support, Williams emphasized. Efforts are under way to get funds to support the various programs planned. He feels good public response to Sunday's festival will help spur the attempts to get more financial backing.

There's hope of getting some foundation support, as well as money from individuals and business firms in the area, Williams added.

Much of what the center has been able to do so far resulted from several important gifts. Money for insuring the

center was donated by three companies. Other individual contributions made possible the purchase of a 16-millimeter movie projector, and two music stores responded with the donation of conga drums and percussion instruments. Different paint and hardware stores donated 30 gallons of paint to dress up the buildings. Much of the furniture has been donated, as well.

To operate the center's full program, Williams said, would cost about \$79,000 a year. He's optimistic much of that can be raised.

Williams sees the center as a group effort by the black artists who have combined their intellectual, physical and material resources in an immediate response to their community.

"The black artist depicts the perseverance—the deprivation, the anger, the very soul—of the black people," he said. "If something has to be said, he says it—without deliberation, but in a spirit which reflects the mood of the black community."

That's what they are hoping will begin coming across, starting with Sunday's festival and the opening of the cultural center.

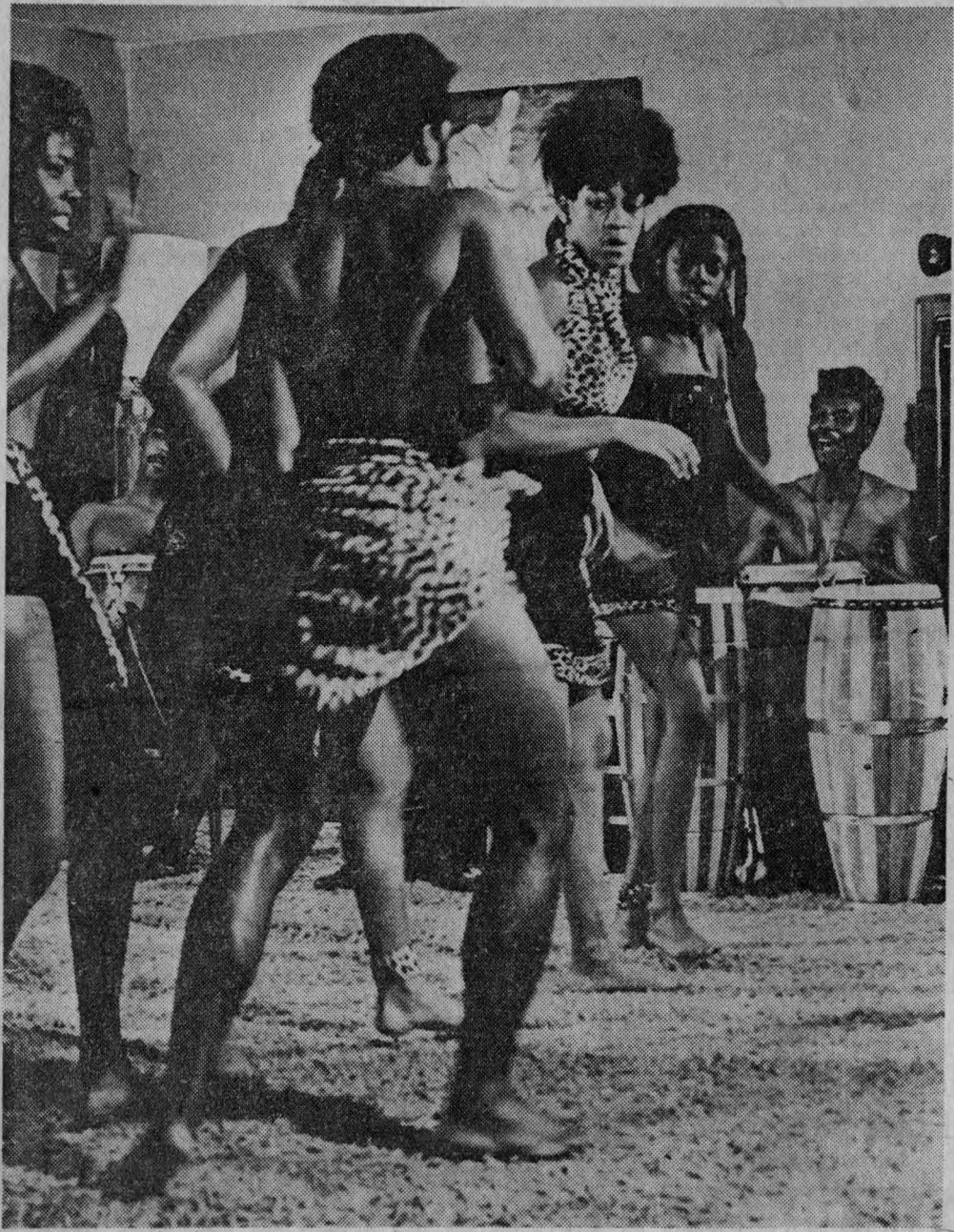


Culture leader

Bearded and bespectacled Clarence Williams is the driving force behind the new Nairobi Cultural Center.

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Dances of Africa

The Habari Nairobi Dance Troupe will be one of the featured attractions at Sunday's "Soul Festival."

New mixed-media musical to open

"I Wish I Were a Trumpet," a new mixed-media musical, will open tonight at Festival Theater in San Anselmo, Marin County's professional resident theater.

The musical, by Elizabeth Berryhill and Mark Bucci, will run Wednesdays through Sundays until August 3. In the show, a cast of 10 sing, dance, and play instruments, augmented by a variety of film and electronic effects.