

IN THE SURF OF MEANINGS

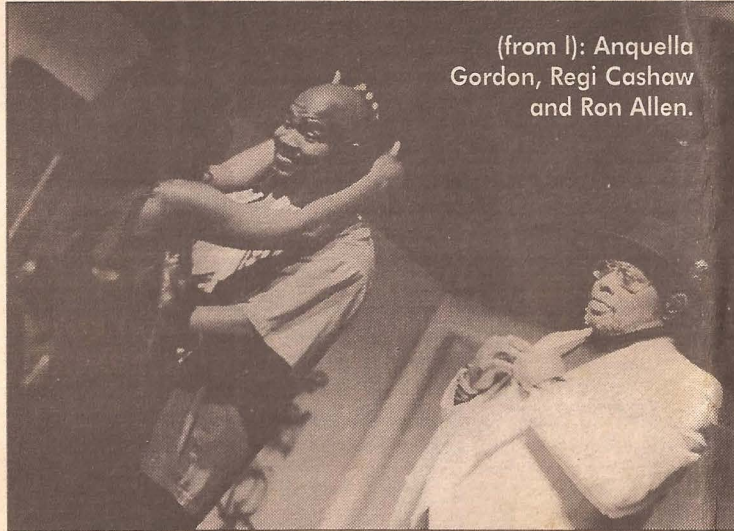
Detroit playwright Ron Allen hears the sound of many waves crashing.

By PAULA FARMER

“WHAM!” may seem like a non-descript adjective or a made-up word bantered about on a playground, but when it’s the title of playwright Ron Allen’s latest production it can take on several different (new) meanings. This unusual play about _____ (fill in the blank) opens up the new season for the Zeitgeist performance space and promises not to be theater as usual.

WHAM!, like its creator, is unabashedly experimental and off the beaten path. In fact, if you try to commit Allen to a nice, neat definition of the term or description of the play, you’ll be disappointed. From his perspective, WHAM!, art and theater are best left up to individual interpretation.

“With this, just as with my other creative ventures, I’m looking to develop the context for a deeper experience and challenging perceptions of art and life,” says Allen. “I’m always trying to understand the pattern and texture of things and how things can be processed. I want to be open to all the energy I can.”



(from I): Anquella Gordon, Regi Cashaw and Ron Allen.

Allen likes to make the comparison to a jazz motif — its interpretation depends on how the musician breathes, and how expansive and energetic the listener is — because Allen’s play exudes energy and experience. Eight short scenes of fast-paced dialogues, monologues, questions, answers and sometimes seemingly nonsensical remarks intrigue, frustrate and mystify the audience, but never bore them. The addition of multimedia components, including

numerous monitors with psychedelic images, flashing lights and a catchy sound track, intensifies the theatrical experience.

But, once again, what is “WHAM!?” It seems to be the subject of political debate, the downfall of a junkie, a curse word among friends and foes, a point of agreement, the object of war and the unifier of nations. It’s the temptation between man and woman, the word from God — or a god — and the conversation piece of the

21st century. Still, there is no one explanation. That’s what makes the play experimental theater, and maybe not for general consumption.

Allen knows his work — now up to five plays and numerous poems — is a far cry from traditional formats. He’s not looking to be the best, necessarily, but rather to be daring, to inspire creativity and provoke thought. “WHAM!” isn’t for the average theatergoers. This takes a certain openness and you have to have a respect for

fringe artists and be willing to bring as much to the experience as you get from it,” he declares. But unlike some “experimental theater” that becomes too experimental to be called theater — or even art — Allen’s work with WHAM! remains sincere and true to his goals, managing to be experimental and edgy without insulting his audience.

To help out in what he calls “an elliptical look at abject desire,” Allen is joined in his acting debut by six talented actors with a flair for drama and comedy, along with co-director Sandra Dee Hines. Although the ensemble initially struggled with interpretation, overall Allen feels the actors ended up capturing a unique sense of awareness concerning the play and their roles.

When Allen isn’t writing, directing or acting, he works at a drug rehab facility in Detroit teaching creative concepts and makes plans for further creative ventures that include travel excursions to assist in maintaining the energy, the WHAM!

Paula Farmer writes about theater for the Metro Times. E-mail her at metro-times@metrotimes.com.

WHERE & WHEN

WHAM!, A PLAY
BY RON ALLEN

Zeitgeist Theater
2661 Michigan Ave., Detroit.
Fri-Sat, Oct. 1-2, 8 p.m.

313-965-9192.