

Richard Pryor Returns To Peoria Stage

By C. VERNE BLOCH Staff Writer

"I'm so happy, so excited. Nobody ever asked me to come here before."

Thus did Richard Pryor, flashing an infectious smile, break into a hilarious 20-minute routine yesterday afternoon at Carver Center.

It was the first performance here of the 28-year-old Negro comedian from Peoria since he gained international fame.

IT WAS ALSO the first benefit show sponsored by the local Afro-American Black Peoples Federation, with all proceeds going to support their programs in the black community.

There were about 175 persons in the audience, the federation realizing several hundred dollars, since Pryor did the show for nothing—even to paying all his expenses.

He had a whirlwind visit, visiting his numerous Peoria relatives and friends before the show and then having just time enough to catch a plane to Chicago, where last night he did a concert at the Hilton Hotel, then flying back to California where he lives.

ONLY EIGHT YEARS ago Pryor had his first professional engagement at the now extinct Harold's Club in the 100 block of N. Washington St.

"I got \$50 a week, and I'm the only entertainer Harold (the late Harold Parker, owner of the club) paid in those days," Pryor reminisced.

How much does he make these days?

"I can make whatever I want — \$300,000, \$400,000 a year," answered Pryor, who admitted his take now runs well over \$100,000. For the past several years he has been a regular on national TV shows and in nightclubs.

He has made two movies and currently is shooting two more in California—where he resides in an \$80,000 home in the exclusive Beverly Hills area.

Having probably the most meteoric rise in show business of any single entertainer in many a year, Pryor yesterday displayed amazing energy despite the fact he had left California at 1 a.m.

Arriving shortly before noon at Greater Peoria Airport, the young comic was taken to Methodist Hospital for a visit with his mother, Mrs. Gertrude Emanuel, who is seriously ill. His father and stepmother both died here within the past year.

HE POPPED into his mother's room, gave her a hand mirror for a present, then a big hug and kiss. She had known he was coming and had primed ahead of time on what to say.

Normally soft-spoken despite the roars and shrieks he throws into the mike to accompany the weird gyrations he goes through in his numerous comedy routines, Pryor said: "Mya, Mom" as he embraced her.

The good that his brief visit did his mother was obvious, and he had confided in an earlier interview that he plans to have her come out to California and live with him in about a month, if possible.

He has a five-year-old son, Richard Pryor Jr., living in

Peoria, by his first wife. She has remarried. And he said that his present wife is expecting their first child in June.

FROM the hospital, Pryor was whisked to Pop's Poolroom, operated by his grandfather, Thomas Bryant, at 618 W. 6th Ave.

There, the comedian played a little pool with his "grampa, soon to be 80," and also visited with his grandmother, Marie, and his Uncle Richard Pryor, who had been at the hospital when Pryor visited with his mother.

Next, he was taken to see his great uncle, Herman Carter, and perhaps other relatives before going to Carver Center—where he got his start more than 10 years ago with the encouragement of Miss Juliette Whittaker, former drama director there.

IT WAS SHE who urged Pryor as a teen-ager to move onto every and any stage he could find and pursue his comedy, singing, dancing, and impressionist talents. And it was Miss Whittaker who also got a kiss and hug from Pryor when they met at Carver Center yesterday.

She and numerous members of his family had front-row seats of honor at the performance.

An aunt, Maxine Johnson, sister, Sharon Pryor, and cousin, Denise Pryor, are among the young comic's other Peoria relatives.

Pryor disclosed in an interview that he is currently making two new movies, one at Paramount Studios called "The Young Lawyers." He says he has a good part in it and that among other actors are Judy Pace and Dick Bass, halfback with the Los Angeles Rams. Shooting on the film has been in progress about a week.

And he's also working on his own film at the Galey Studios in Westwood. "We've been shooting that one two weeks. I head the company making it, Black Sun Productions," said Pryor.

The name of this one is "The Trial" and Pryor describes it as a "sort of Uncle Tom's Fairy Tale" and says he hopes it carries a message. He says two parts. He says "an angel is helping finance it."

Pryor said his own initial product is a deplorable "black humor," they kidnap a rich white man and have a trial for him—holding court. We use a lot of surrealism in the plot.

He revealed that he is cancelling a lot of night club work these days and "trying to go more and more into the movie business, both with his own company and at other studios.

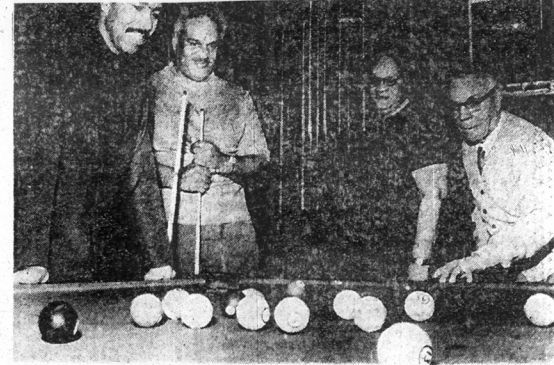
He writes all of his own material for TV and other appearances. Many times much of it is based on recollections of his own boyhood experiences in Peoria.

His routine here yesterday, for example, was geared pretty much toward his immediate audience—with the exception of his by-now standard impressions of meeting girls, being born, encounter with Army life, "cops," political jokes and

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PRYOR IN ACTION



AT HIS GRANDFATHER'S POOL HALL, Pryor, his Uncle Richard Pryor, his grandmother and grandfather, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bryant.



JULIETTE WHITTAKER WATCHES THE SHOW



VISITING HIS MOTHER IN HOSPITAL —Staff photos by Dennis Trumble

NORMAL PEOPLES — of the Peoria Journal, a group of educators that public relations

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impersonations of former President Johnson and President Nixon.

Rushed though he was because of his limited time schedule in Peoria, Pryor evoked constant belly laughs from the audience as he recalled childhood experiences in State Park, Irving school, Carver Center and his old neighborhood, and mentioned some of his old cronies by name.

He was dapper in tan shoes, tan leather jacket and turtleneck sweater combination, and light gray trousers.

HE THANKED the Afro-American Black Peoples Federation for bringing him to Peoria, expressing pride that he is an Afro-American dedicated, as is the federation, to doing all possible for the black community. The federation is planning several other benefits in the future.

Sharing entertainment honors with Pryor were The Struts, the Ace of Spades, Peggy and the Soul Setters, The Passions, Michelle Minor and Brenda Williams — local instrumental and singing groups.

Pryor made his national television debut in the summer of 1964 in the show "On Broadway Tonight," after his two-year stint in the Army. Spotted by Rudy Vallee in Greenwich Village, he landed that TV engagement and proved such a hit he got a return offer.

PRIOR to that he appeared at the Cafe Wha? in New York, where he spent a year. He then moved uptown where he appeared at The Living Room, the Cafe Au Go Go and the Champagne Gallery in New York.

By 1966 he had appeared on the Ed Sullivan and Johnny Carson shows and had made his first movie.

Recently, he returned from a tour of Europe and the Middle East. He is under management of Creative Management Associates of Beverly Hills.

Pryor comes by his talents naturally. His father was a former vaudeville comedian and singer.

Art Teacher Wife Dies After Crash

Mrs. Carolyn L. Winters, wife of a Peoria High School art teacher, died at 5:10 yesterday in St. Elizabeth Hospital of injuries sustained in a two-car collision at 6:45 Friday two miles south of on Rt. 26.

She was a passenger in a car driven by her husband, I. G. Winters, 25, of 249 Oak Ct. He was listed in fair condition last night in Memorial Hospital in Princeton. The Winters' 5-month daughter, Natalie J., was in good condition in the hospital.

According to state police, Winters' northbound car collided nearly head-on on S-curve with a southbound car driven by John D. Hasenrath, 22, of Rockford. Hasenrath was treated at Perry Men Hospital and released.

Mrs. Winters was first to the Princeton hospital later transferred to St. Elizabeth by Peoria County Coroner Horace Payton.

Mrs. Winters was born 1, 1945, in Iowa, the daughter of Doll and Ruth Sk Westcott.

Funeral services will be conducted at Walker Funeral Home in Freeport. Arrangements are being handled by Wilton Mortuary.

Burned Girls

Two girls were burned in a fire at the Peoria High School.