Celebrating the life of
PROF. BUDDY BUTLER
1946-2021

There are no black or white emotions. You hurt, I hurt. Pain is pain. Love is love. It’s the occasion which is different, not so much the feeling. But if we break life down the essentials, we share almost everything. The only difference is our cultural and historic context.

- Professor Buddy Butler

About Buddy Butler
A Message from the Film & Theatre Chair

When Theatre Arts Professor Charles “Buddy” Butler was just eight-years-old, he was invited to audition for a play at Cleveland’s Karamu Theater, one of the oldest African-American theater groups in the country. He landed a part in “Jezebel’s Husband,” a satire by Robert Nathan, igniting a lifelong love of theater. Butler believed theater was a medium for preserving cultural history and exploring universal truth.

Butler’s extensive professional credits spanned numerous affiliations coast to coast and internationally. He was an original member of the Negro Ensemble Company of NYC and was also a founding member of the Black Theatre Alliance and the Black Theatre Network. He appeared both on Broadway (six productions) and Off-Broadway, plus two national tours. He was best known for his long association with the Denver Center for the Performing Arts where he was Associate Artistic Director of the Bonfils theatre for ten years and directed over thirty-five productions. His production of Samm-Art Williams Home was the first African-American production to tour Eastern Europe and his production of Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom won him the Denver Critic’s Award for Best Director and Best Production.

In Northern California, Buddy directed at the Oakland Ensemble Theatre, Lorraine Hansberry Theatre in SF, Images Theatre in Sacramento, the San Jose Stage Company, City Lights Theatre, San Jose Repertory Theatre, and Tabia Theatre Ensemble where his directorial credits included Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, Fences, Spunk, Flyin’ West, A Soldier’s Play, Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill, Jar the Floor, and the world premiere of The Fragrance of Freedom. He also directed Master Harold and the Boys at the Sacramento Theatre Company where it was voted the “best revival” of the 2013 season by the Sacramento Bee.

Buddy was also the artistic director of The Magic Carpet Theater in San José, CA— The Magic Carpet Theater was produced at San José State University where he was a member of the Theatre Arts Faculty for the Department of Film and Theatre for 25+ years before he began his retirement in 2019. Additionally, he was a proud graduate of Howard University and the University of Washington.

Over the course of his career, Buddy was the recipient of numerous awards including two Audelco Awards, one Obie, and the NAACP Trailblazer Award. In 2010, he received the Black Theatre Networks Winona Fletcher Award for Outstanding Achievement and Excellence in Black Theatre. In 2017, he received the Black Legend Award.

For a more information about Buddy’s 2017 Black Legend Award, please visit the following link: https://www.blacklegendawards.org/2017BlackLegendNominees.asp

To see Buddy’s YouTube Interview of when he received the Black Legends Award, see here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mic0YfUYYu

Though Buddy was fortunate enough to live a tremendously fulfilling life and pursue a successful and abundant theatre career, we are truly devastated by his sudden passing. His nearly three decades of service to the university was an integral part of our department’s success and legacy. His contributions will be forever valued and his presence and teachings will be sorely missed.

The famous poet and essayist June Jordan wrote, ”We have come too far, We can’t turn around, We’ll flood the streets with justice, We are Freedom Bound!” May Buddy rest in power with the ancestors.

In advance, thank you for your love and support of Buddy’s family and for taking the time to read this short, but important tribute to a beloved professor of the arts. If you would like to donate to his family, visit: https://www.gofundme.com/f/295wtnze2o

In Solidarity,
Elisha Miranda
Chair and Professor
Department of Film and Theatre