

ARTS & LEISURE

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'Freedom' was inspiring

Just as Mississippi's three decades of political progress sometimes seems to be rolling backwards in the 1990s, a new play reminds us why Mississippi should never turn back.

Mississippi Freedom by Obie Award-winning playwright Robbie McCauley of New York had its world premiere last weekend in Jackson.

Lest we tragically forget, the play surveyed the often-inspiring, often-harrowing history of Mississippi race relations since the 1960s.

It's not some Broadway or Hollywood interpretation. The informal, non-fiction script — which is illuminating instead of condescending — was developed from interviews with Mississippians involved in the civil rights movement.

For both performances, a multiracial Jackson cast drew large multiracial crowds who remained in sweltering heat in the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center's sweltering auditorium to see this thoughtful work.

Performers re-enacted the trips of freedom riders and fears of activists. Videos and slides flashed back through the years. As part of the play, the audience discussed modern questions: Did integration work? Are we really sharing lives?

Mississippi Freedom is dramatically positive, culturally inclusive and philosophically expansive. It speaks to every American.

Mississippians will have a second chance to see it when the play goes on a statewide tour. Watch for dates here. It's produced by The Arts Company of Cambridge, Mass., and Potpourri Theater Company of Jackson.