

'Freedom' tour makes local stop

From Special Reports

"Mississippi Freedom," a theater event drawing on the personal stories of living Mississippians to explore race relations, will be presented Tuesday and Wednesday at the University of Southern Mississippi.

This is the first performance of a statewide tour of "Mississippi Freedom," which was created by New York theater artist Robbie McCauley in collaboration with 11 actors, storytellers and singers from the Jackson area.

"Mississippi Freedom" places special emphasis on the "freedom riders" and the voting rights struggle of the 1960s as a watershed of change for the entire country.

It is being presented by The Arts Company of Cambridge, Mass., in association with the Afro-American Student Organization of the University of

THEATER

Southern Mississippi and Potpourri Artistic Repertory Theater of Jackson.

The show premiered in Jackson in May.

"It's not some Broadway or Hollywood interpretation," a reviewer for the *Clarion-Ledger* wrote following the premiere. "The informal, non-fiction script...is illuminating instead of condescending. 'Mississippi Freedom' is dramatically positive, culturally inclusive and philosophically expansive. It speaks to every American."

McCauley and her collaborators collected oral histories from people in the state and elsewhere earlier this year that form the basis of much of the piece. This was combined with the performers' own stories and interaction among

themselves, and with McCauley. There is also a section in which the audience and the performers talk to each other about contemporary issues.

"Having done performances of my own family history as it related to the social history about us in the South (Georgia, where she spent most of her childhood), the West (where her grandfather was a Buffalo Soldier) and Washington, D.C. (where her immediate family settled), I have started to work with artists in other communities telling and retelling personal stories connected to social events," McCauley said.

"I hope, in Mississippi, that telling stories as performance and developing theater arts out of existing culture is encouraged. Another intention is to use art in a way that celebrates the hard and good changes that Mississippians have struggled to

"MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM"

- 7 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday
- USM Polymer Science Building Auditorium
- Tickets: \$3 for general public; \$2 for senior citizens; free to USM students, faculty and staff; available at the door

bring about for generations."

McCauley is a veteran of the New York stage, having appeared in the original Broadway production of "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf," as well as some off-Broadway productions.

A writer and director as well as an actress, she began to create her own musical theater performances in 1979 and, in the mid-1980s, a series of autobiographical works based on historical events. For one of those, "Sally's Rape," she

received a 1992 OBIE award for "Best New Play" and a 1990 New York Dance and Performance ("Bessie") award. She recently served as dialogue coach for the Hollywood film "Juice," directed by Ernie Dickerson.

The 11 cast members are African-American and Caucasian, range in age from early 20s to mid-60s and live in the Jackson area, though the original home of many of them are located throughout the state. Most were involved in or have personal memories of the voting rights struggle in the 1960s.

They are Ona Banks, Veronica Cooper, James Green, Willi Horton, Deborah Imboden, Dic Johnson, Kent Lambert, Sada Muhammad, Sameera Muhammad, Sheila Richardson and Kay King Valentine.

They will join McCauley after the performance for a discussion with audience members.



HOT DATES

September 22, 1992

Today's best bet

- "MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM": statewide tour
- 7 p.m. today and Wednesday; Polymer Science Building Auditorium, USM campus
 - Tickets: \$3 for general public, \$2 for senior citizens, free for USM personnel