

Local theater honors two gangs keeping the peace

By Mike Seate

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In an unusual convergence of theater and real-life drama, members of two city gangs honored a truce and were honored themselves at the University of Pittsburgh's Stephen Foster Memorial late last week.

The Kuntu Repertory Theater, the university's black production company, staged a performance Thursday night of Pittsburgh playwright Rob Penny's *Little Willie Armstrong Jones*, a humorous drama based on the lives of a Hill District family.

Before a packed house, the theater company paused afterward to laud members of two North Side gangs that instituted a policy of non-violence almost a week earlier.

The gang members, dressed in baggy blue jeans, declined interviews and referred questions to a panel of North Side parents who had helped secure the cease-fire. During the public discussion, par-

ents of slain gang members spoke of the importance of enforcing the truce, while some teenagers told of the difficulty of living life "within a war zone."

Lee Kiburi of Pitt's Black Studies Department said the fact that "this many gang members could come together without bloodshed proves that a truce can work." Kiburi took the stage and said the gang member's actions can teach all Pittsburghers about the importance of peacefully settling differences.

The cease-fire involves the North Side O.G.'s (Original Gangsters) and the Manchester Hoodtown Mafia.

Chairman Khalid Raheem of the Pittsburgh Gang Peace Council, which is sponsoring the upcoming gang summit in the city, also spoke. He said the truce has made "the North Side one of Pittsburgh's safest neighborhoods. If all the gangs honor this truce, my work at the summit will be a lot easier."

Raheem said the truce was "a life decision and not to be taken lightly."