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People seek 'place' in Pabst play [Review of Charles Gordone's play "No Place to Be Somebody" at the Pabst Theater, Milwaukee]

Curtis Carter

Marquette University, curtis.carter@marquette.edu

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by Curtis L. Carter

Charles Gordone's Pulitzer prize drama, **No Place to Be Somebody**, opened Monday night at the Pabst Theater under the sponsorship of the Milwaukee Inner City Arts Council, for a five day run.

No Place happens in a New York bar which hardly ever has customers, but is the meeting place for struggling actors, dancers, musicians, prostitutes, and small

time hoodlums. The lines are clever throughout, dealing with the struggle of the characters to find a place. The acting is of fine quality, allowing each character to develop a distinctive personality that unfolds as the play proceeds.

Johnny, the black proprietor of the bar, is obsessed with making it in the realm of big time crime. He waits ten years for his boyhood idol, a minor gangster, to return from prison, and

is shocked to hear his friend advise him to give up his ambition and do something more worthwhile. Johnny does not heed the advice and is carried over his head into the intricacies of the mob activities. His attempt to use the files of a judge's daughter to "move in" are ineffective.

A complex character, Johnny shows kindness to his friend who works for him as a prostitute. He is generous with his friends

while pretending not to respect their artistic aspirations. In a crisis it is Johnny who is able to give support and understanding, as when Shanty, his bartender is unable to face the fact that his aspirations about playing drums are really no more than dreams.

Count Stovall, playing the part of a young actor (Gabe), Bob Molock as an aspiring dancer — he falls on the stage in his great moment as a dancer — and Yvonne Sutherland as Cora, are exceptional in their contribution to the overall humor of the performance. Gabe delivers a near show-stopping satire on blacks trying to be "clean and white."

The best thing about "No Place" is its success in creating characters who are not stereotypes. They are real, believable people who tell much more than their own life stories. They show suffering, struggle, aspiration and thwarted ambition with perceptible insight.

Gordone, a black playwright, is the first to receive the Pulitzer prize for an off Broadway play. The New York production ran for 572 performances.