

Xtra

Your guide to arts, films, music and more

A MOVING and dramatic tribute to more than 5,000 years of black history takes centre stage at the Hackney Empire next week.

Acclaimed musical, *Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame*, highlights the contributions and achievements made by black men and women towards creating world peace as well as acknowledging their accomplishments in the worlds of science, sports and entertainment.

With an all new line-up of characters, songs and dances, the show magically recreates significant moments in black history by bringing to life some of the most important figures of times past, including Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

Described as cross between a travelling black history museum and a "live version" of Madame Tussauds, *Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame* aims to inspire,

by ANN LEE

educate and entertain.

The show made history when it opened at the Astoria Theatre by becoming the first all-black production to play in the West End.

The show's creator, Flip Fraser, said: "When we first launched *Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame*, we saw it as a great way to promote positive race relations and to highlight to audiences of all races what black people had achieved.

"Twenty years later, we still believe it is the perfect vehicle to remind us - and especially our youth - just how much more we have left to accomplish."

Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame starts on Tuesday at the Empire in Mare Street, Hackney, and runs until March 10. Performances start at 7.30pm and tickets cost between £15 and £25. The box office is on 020 8985 2424.

Russian writer Alexander Pushkin's great, great-grandfather was Abyssinian

INSIDE

- Film review - The Illusionist
- Interview - Angelina Jolie
- Competitions
- Agony Aunt
- TV Guide

Heroic performance



Busy Diane stakes a claim to fame

HACKNEY MP Diane Abbott has been inducted into a hall of fame that includes Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King.

Ms Abbott, who was the first black woman to be elected to the House of Commons 20 years ago, was surprised to be added to a list of role models who feature in the Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame.

The MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington was given the accolade at the Hackney Empire in Mare Street last Thursday at a performance of *Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame*, celebrating 5,000 years of black history.

Cast members dressed as figures from the hall of fame mingled with Ms Abbott and the other guests, who included *The Apprentice* winner, Tim Campbell, and TV soap star Rudolph Walker, from *EastEnders*.

The MP, who chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gun Crime, said: "It was a complete surprise to me, a real shock.

"Many of those who have been inducted into the Black Heroes



Heading for the hall of fame – Diane Abbott (centre), with Tahira Jumrah as Diana Ross (left) and Ahmar Ferguson as Shaka Zulu

in the Hall of Fame are dead, so it's a tremendous honour to be inducted in my own lifetime.

"Also to be alongside those people who have been my own personal heroes is just fantastic."

Robert Lee, chairman of the Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame committee, said they had added Ms Abbott to the list for lots of reasons.

"We chose her not just because she's the longest-serving black female MP, but because she is particularly involved in championing the education of young black males," said Mr Lee.

"It was particularly apt to induct her at the Empire because she was on stage 20 years ago when *Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame* was first performed and she had just been elected.

"She was the one person who came out above everyone else."

● Four hundred parents gath-

ered at Ocean in Mare Street on Saturday at a conference organised by Diane Abbott to discuss how to help black children achieve more in Hackney schools.

The Hackney MP is founder of the London Schools and the Black Child Initiative and the conference saw parents given workshops on criminal youth culture as well as the best way of communicating with schools.

It also included speeches by Ms Abbott, Tim Campbell, from *The Apprentice*, and Alan Wood, chief executive of The Learning Trust, Hackney's education authority

Supt Leroy Logan, from Hackney police, was also invited to talk about the borough's gang problem after it was revealed that Hackney had more gangs than any other London borough.

Ms Abbott told the *Gazette* she thought bad education was responsible for leading youngsters into gangs, rather than the culture tempting them out of school.

"If we can deal with this issue of education failure, we are half way to dealing with the gang problem," she said.

"The fact we can get 400 parents together on a Saturday morning shows they are ready to help their children—and we are giving them the tools.

"Black children's results in Hackney have improved, but not enough and they are still below the national average," she added.



Encouraging black children to achieve – Diane Abbott, with Tim Campbell