

Musical being shown as part of observance

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CUMBERLAND — Black History Month will be the focus as the New Embassy Theatre, 49 Baltimore St., shows the 1943 musical classic "Cabin in the Sky," beginning Thursday.

The MGM film stars Lena Horne, Ethel Waters, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, and contains music and lyrics written by, among others, Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg, according to Mark Baker, director of the Embassy.

"It's been touted ... labeled ... the best American musical ever made," said Baker. "It was directed by Vincente Minnelli, who, as a matter of fact, is Liza Minnelli's father, and Judy Garland's husband.

"This was Minnelli's directorial debut, fresh from Hollywood from a stint as art director for Radio City Music Hall. Mr. Minnelli had, coincidentally, directed the original Broadway version from which the film was taken."

Queen City Tours is sponsoring this event along with the Embassy Theatre. An opening night reception will start at 6:30 p.m. and the

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show starts at 7:30. The show will be repeated Friday and Saturday at the same time.

During the reception, local historian Al Feldstein is set to lead a panel discussion with Frostburg State University professor John Wiseman and columnist Jo Beynon and the audience in a historical discussion about Cumberland and the country the year the film was released.

"With its universal theme of the classic struggle between good

and evil, the film speaks to every generation of movie-goers who've ever gone to church, prayed or been tempted to sin," said Baker.

The film also stars Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Butterfly McQueen, the Hall Johnson Choir, Oscar Polk, Willie Best and the Louis Armstrong Orchestra.

One hit tune, "Happiness is Just a Thing Called Joe," sung by Waters, was nominated for a Best Song Oscar. "Takin' a Chance on Love," sung by Horne, is another hit from the original Broadway score.

"Lena Horne and Ethel Waters played in the film, and Lena Horne broke her foot and she could not dance in a sequence, and was given Miss Waters' song to sing," said Baker.

Film critic Pauline Kael writes, "This joyful, stylized treatment of Negro folklore, with an all-star black cast, is one of the best musicals of this century, that gets even better with the years."

Reservations are not needed, said Baker. For further details, call the Embassy at (301) 722-4692.