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Celebrating a Man Who Dared to Dream

By BRENDA REES, Special to The Times

From parades to movie screenings, from speeches and gospel singing to doll-making workshops, there is a multitude of ways to observe the Martin Luther King Jr. birthday holiday this weekend.

One of the most unusual is "The Right to Dream," a multimedia presentation at the Museum of Tolerance in West Los Angeles that is less about the man himself than the times in which he lived.

Rachel McLinton didn't want "The Right to Dream" to be simply a memory play about civil rights in the 1960s. "We tell it as if it was in the present. We want people to experience what it was like to be living in the South at that time," said McLinton, artistic director of Living Voices, the production company that will be presenting the work three times Monday.

Combining theater, video clips and interaction with the audience, the presentation re-creates a young man's coming of age in Mississippi during turbulent times. The teenager--a fictional Everyman called Raymond Hollis--witnesses prejudice and lynchings but also participates in voter-registration efforts, the march on Washington and other civil rights activities.

Hollis' story is an emotional and personal one, McLinton said, and she believes this is the best way to understand historical events.

"We have to connect to an individual, not a statistic," she explained, adding that people need to be reminded about the many others who "worked and believed along with Dr. King. As important as he is, there was a galaxy of others who were part of the movement. That's what King Day represents."

* "The Right to Dream" will be presented Monday at 11:30 a.m., 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. at the Museum of Tolerance, 9786 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles. Advance reservations are required; call (310) 772-2526. Due to some violent images and strong language, children under 10 years old are not encouraged to attend.

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A sampling of other King-related events:

In Long Beach, the 13th annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration kicks off with a parade Saturday at 10:30 a.m. that will begin at the corner of 10th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. There will be food, music and festivities afterward at King Park, 1950 Lemon Ave. Call (562) 570-6816 for more information.

Traditional praise and worship music and dance, as well as multicultural interpretations



of gospel music, will be featured Saturday at Gospel Fest, sponsored by the Rosa Parks Sexual Assault Crisis Center. Held at St. Brigid Catholic Church, 5214 S. Western Ave., Los Angeles, the free event at 6:30 p.m. will feature the St. Brigid New Generational Choir and other local music groups. For more information, call (323) 290-4100.

More marchers take to the streets Monday in Baldwin Hills for the 21st annual Martin Luther King Kingdom Parade, which begins at 11 a.m. at Crenshaw and Martin Luther King Boulevards. A celebration in Martin Luther King Jr. Park, at Western and 39th, follows the parade, complete with award presentations, music and family events.

And yet another parade is planned Monday as the city of Inglewood hosts its 18th annual procession honoring King, with more than 1,000 residents, bands, drill teams and community groups expected to participate. The pre-parade activities begin at 8 a.m. at Inglewood High School, followed by the march at 9 a.m. from there to the Faithful Central Bible Church, 321 N. Eucalyptus Ave., where an ecumenical service will be held. For more information, call (310) 412-5300.

King, who would have been 72 on Monday, will be the subject of a film series and a lecture on Monday at the California African-American Museum, 600 State Drive, Los Angeles. "In Remembrance of Martin" and Gordon Parks' "Martin" will be shown in the afternoon; the discussion about King's impact on American society and the rest of the world will be held at 1 p.m. For more information, call (213) 744-7432.

Glenn H. Stassen of the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena will address the 13th annual King Day celebration at 7 p.m. Monday at the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council at the First United Methodist Church, 4832 Tujunga Ave., North Hollywood. Information: (818) 718-6460, Ext. 3002.

The Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co. will be hosting an open house on Monday from 1 to 4 p.m. for visitors to view its extensive collection of African American art, which includes two large 1949 murals depicting the history of black settlers in California. For reservations, call (323) 731-1131, Ext. 237.

And finally, the William Grant Still Arts Center commemorates the King holiday with a doll-making workshop that is part of its current annual "Black Doll Exhibit." "Dolls are a vital part of rituals, ceremonies and not just play toys," says museum curator Miriam Watson Ferguson. "They are symbols of our culture and heritage."

On Monday, families are invited to attend a workshop to create their own soft-sculpture doll. The event has been held for the past 10 years. "We get a good sense of camaraderie, and people get to use their creative sides, which is good," Ferguson says. "Martin Luther King Jr. would love to see all these families working on something together like this."

* The William Grant Still Arts Center is at 2520 S. West View St., Los Angeles. Held from 3 to 7 p.m., the workshop is free, but there is a cost for materials. For reservations, call (323) 734-1164.

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