



JO JO DANCER

Richard Pryor has been making his often-checkered life the basis of his art for many years. Gritty subjects like racism, drug abuse, sex and violence—they're all there in Pryor's legendary stand-up shows. But until now, little of the 'real' Richard Pryor has spilled over into his film roles.

There can hardly help but be plenty of Pryor in

Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling, the new film Pryor wrote, produced, directed and in which he stars. Consider that *Dancer* is the story of a well-known entertainer "at the peak of his popularity and at the bottom of his self-esteem" who has a serious accident at his home.

He is rushed to the hospital, and, as he lies in intensive care, reviews the events of his life. The parallels between the Pryor behind the camera and the Pryor in front of it become almost too close for comfort.

Says Pryor, "when you mess up . . . and you're talking to an expert in messing up . . . the only way to put it behind you and get on with life is to be brutally honest. Self-deception is one of the worst drugs there is."

Pryor is talking about his own accident, when he was seriously burned while preparing drugs (today Pryor

no longer takes drugs and campaigns against drug use). Just as dancer-director Bob Fosse used his own life and heart attack as the basis for his acclaimed film, *All That Jazz*, so Pryor feels *Jo Jo Dancer* is "my vision. It's not a documentary; it's not the story of my life. Like any writer or director or actor—or in this case all three—I've used what I know about to create something everybody can relate to. And these days, I think I can finally say I know about *myself*."

Taking on twin acting and directing burdens was an education, Pryor says, since, "the two jobs take a different kind of energy. There were times when I was dead on my feet as an actor, but the other half of me, the director, was ready to go all night."

To help him through the production, filmed on locations around Los Angeles and in the Midwest, Pryor



(Left, clockwise from top) Debbie Allen, Tanya Boyd, Barbara Williams and Fay Hauser as the women in JoJo's life. (Above) Richard Pryor.

had such experienced hands as cinematographer John A. Alonzo (*Norma Rae*, *Chinatown*) and production designer John De Cuir (Three-time Oscar winner for *Hello, Dolly*, *The King and I* and *Cleopatra*).

Populating Pryor's "fantasy concept" which spans four decades from the 1940's to today, are Billy Eckstine as a showman, Carmen McRae as Jo Jo's grandmother, Diahnne Abbott

and Scoey Mitchell as Jo Jo's parents and Debbie Allen, Barbara Williams and Tanya Boyd as the very different women he has wooed and won.

So, does Jo Jo learn from the experience that almost killed his creator? "You'll have to see the film to find out," says Pryor, "but Richard never felt better." *Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling* opens nationwide this December. ♦