

ENTERTAINMENT

HAPPENINGS

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Legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis will be in concert on Wednesday, January 13th, 8:00 p.m. at the Civic Auditorium. Ticket prices are \$9., \$11, and \$12.50.

Miles Davis Returns

MILES DAVIS IS THE GREATEST trumpeter/stylist since the legendary Louis Armstrong. Davis' musical concepts and groundbreaking bands changed the course of postwar jazz several times; and he changed the face of both jazz and rock in the late '60s and early '70s with his popularization of fusion.

When Miles Davis stopped performing in the spring of 1976, rumors flew that the legendary jazz trumpeter would never play again. Once he had been sighted occasionally on the streets of New York; now he was not seen at all. Like an invalid under self-imposed quarantine, Davis remained hidden away in his Manhattan brownstone for five years, admitting only his most trusted friends. Anguished fans began lingering on his block, staring at his windows, pawing through his garbage for some clue to his mood, and listening in vain for the lonely, probing sound of his trumpet. Then came word of a series of operations. Some of his followers concluded that Miles Davis, embittered and alone, was dying.

Happily, the mourning was premature. When Davis, 55, returned to live performances this summer, and released *The Man With the Horn*, his first new recording in six years, he was accorded the kind of greeting reserved for a demigod. Almost immediately, the album soared to the top of the jazz charts, then became a pop hit as well. Davis had demonstrated once again that as a composer and stylist, he is one of the few jazz artists capable of reaching beyond the genre for an audience. His 60 recordings, so widely imitated by other musicians, wed emotional sophistication with a rare simplicity of form.

Miles learned about exacting professional standards from his father, Miles Dewey Davis II, a successful oral surgeon. His interest in music was the legacy of his mother, Cleota, a piano teacher. Born in Alton, Ill., Miles grew up on a farm in nearby East St. Louis, where his father raised horses and pedigree pigs as a hobby. "My family was strict," he recalls. "I couldn't fool around. I knew that whatever I did, if it wasn't good, my father was going to strangle me."

When he was 12, Miles received his first instruction on trumpet from one of his father's patients, Elwood Buchanan. He taught the youngster to play without vibrato and suggested a unique mouth exercise to improve his technique. "He told me to spit rice all the way to school," Davis remembers. "So I'd have a mouthful and spit for a mile and a half."

Before his protracted absence, Miles Davis was both the foundation and the focal point of the new movement toward a fusion of jazz and rock which has spawned a wealth of new, young talent. His influence on other musicians was awesome; there's not one among the new generation who wouldn't immediately acknowledge the debt he owes to Davis. Says Carlos Santana: "He's the last of the Picassos. The thing about Miles—and it's been said before—is that he doesn't have 'this' or 'that,' but what he does have is tremendous sense of vision and imagination. A lot musicians have a lot of talent, but they don't know how to write songs or put them together. So they become better when they're around Miles because they become like a Maserati car, and he's the driver. He's the best because he knows where to take it, because otherwise the car is just standing there."

For more than three decades, fans and musicians alike have looked to Miles Davis for the major breakthroughs, the changes in style and form.

LEGENDARY JAZZ TRUMPETER

MILES DAVIS

IN CONCERT

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 1982
Civic Auditorium
8:00 P.M.

Ticket Prices: \$9., \$11, \$12.50
Ticket Outlets: Stevens & Son, Music & Print
Ticket Place, All G.I. Job stores, Auditorium

Movie Review

Ragtime

The real surprise in the movie version of E.L. Doctorow's popular novel of turn-of-the-century America—*Ragtime*—is not that director Milos Forman was able to project a coherent narrative from such competitive images onto the screen.

It is that Blacks, who occupied a large part of the novel, have made their contribution to that restless period in U.S. history live again through the character of Coalhouse Walker, Jr. As played by Howard E. Rollins, Jr., Walker comes across as an intelligent, sensitive man who decides to stand up and demand retribution when his pride is damaged by racist whites just once too often.

Walker is a ragtime piano player who works his way through demeaning beer joint jobs and anonymous stints providing musical sound tracks for silent movies to finally land a better position as lead pianist in a ragtime band. He makes good money in a fancy Black roadhouse of the era and intends to marry his sweetheart, Sara, who has meanwhile borne him a son and tried, in her despair at Walker's seeming abandonment, to leave the child in the garden of a wealthy white couple (played by Mary Steenburgen—of *Melvin and Howard*—and James Olson).

Walker is taunted by white volunteer firemen on his way back from proposing to Sara (taken in with her son by the sympathetic couple) and is enraged when they block his brand new Model T and demand an exorbitant \$25 "toll." Refusing to bow to their racist demands, Walker leaves the car to find help from a policeman, returns, and finds the firemen have shoveled horse manure onto the front seat of his car and damaged its exterior.

This relatively common act against a Black man, especially those who were becoming prosperous in the boom times of the early 1900s, mushrooms into a vendetta. Walker proclaims against the fire chief and firehouses in general after Sara dies from a bludgeoning received from a policeman when she tries to present Walker's plight to a visiting politician.

Aided by friends, including the white brother-in-law of the man who took in Sara (played by Brad Dourif, who also appeared as Susan Sarandon's husband in *Atlantic City*), Walker destroys several firehouses around New York in a series of fire bombings, and finally holes up in the J.P. Morgan Library on Madison Ave. Named for a fabulously wealthy financier of the period, the library houses priceless treasures, and the police therefore restrain themselves from storming the library to capture Walker, who in the meantime, has mined the place.

He demands only that the chief of the firehouse whose volunteers offended him be delivered to the library—and to Walker's "justice"—



HOWARD ROLLINS JR.

and that his car, cleaned and repaired, be delivered to the front of the library steps.

Booker T. Washington is enlisted by N.Y. City Police Commissioner Rheinlander Waldo (portrayed by James Cagney in his heralded return to the silver screen) to talk Walker out of his plan. Washington fails, but not before delivering an eloquent plea to Walker not to "set back the cause of our people." An action like yours undoes the work of hundreds of other Blacks who only want to work and prosper alongside whites, he tells Walker. Although moved by Washington's plea, Walker stands by his demands.

"I'd like Coalhouse to be seen not just as a terrorist, but as a man of principle and action," says actor Rollins in an interview in *American Film* magazine. "He has exhausted every legal means at his disposal and is left with no other choice."

Rollins, 31, appeared in Portland at the film's premiere. He starred in the 1978 miniseries *King*, in which he played Andrew Young, and portrayed Alex Haley's brother George in *Roots: The Next Generations*. He knows the part of Coalhouse Walker, Jr. is one of the most significant for Black actors in many years of Hollywood films and recognizes achieving success is much more difficult for Black actors and actresses.

"If you happen to be Black, things are going to take a bit longer. I've always heard that as a Black person you have to work twice as hard. It's true. It's important for people to realize that. But, on the other hand, to steep yourself in that kind of thinking is ultimately stifling."

Discouraged by the lack of substantive roles for Blacks in the film business, a group in California is currently calling for a boycott of Hollywood movies.

Although their disgust is more than warranted by most studio products, *Ragtime*, with its portrayal of Blacks as real, sensitive and intelligent people having a great impact on U.S. history, is well worth the viewer's time.

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