

# ENTERTAINMENT

## BROADWAY BOUND REPORT

by Garland Lee Thompson



Maya Angelou

### THE QUEEN OF "THE BLACKS" GRACES "OUR TOWN" WITH POETRY AND WIT

Wednesday afternoon, February 23rd. It was lunch at the Heathman Hotel, "the watering hole" of Portland literary and art circles, after our (IFCC) matinee of "The Colored Museum" (as dramaturg/production stage manger, currently running at the Winningstad Theatre). I joined my fellow journalist, Stephen McPherson, seating with our dear friend and artist, Maya Angelou, the original "Queen" of Jean Genet's great tragic-farce, "the Blacks." She was and is still "The Queen" of "The Blacks," theatrically speaking and perhaps in other dimensions as well. While recalling the opening of that New York, East Village theatre production (then the longest running Off Broadway dramatic play), "Her Majesty," Maya Angelou, "held court" Throughout the afternoon, sipping her white wine, light lunch and letting me nibble at her whole wheat bread and butter, she sat regally weaving her powerful personal tales and moments of the history of her experience as an actress with the super hit Jean New York and gave a host of great and near great Black actors, such as James Earl Jones, Cecily Tyson, Roscoe Lee Browne, Helen Martin, Godfrey Cambridge, etc., some much needed work exposure and training. Later, after I came to New York with the Charlie Gordone [play, "No Place To Be Somebody (he originally played the Valet in "The Blacks"\_, I worked with her as a stage manager when she received a Tony nomination for her performance in 1973 for her Broadway debut in Jerome Kilty's play, "Look Away." The piece was about Mary Todd Lincoln and her Black seamstress/confidante, Elizabeth Keckley, starring with Geraldine Page at the 48th Street Playhouse with Rip Torn directing.

**WRITING BROUGHT HER RELIEF FROM THE PROBLEMS OF LIVING**  
 Maya Angelou has written three autobiographical novels, "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" (1970); "Gather Together in My Name" (1974); and "Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas" (1976). Earlier in 1971, She published a collection of 39 poems, "Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Die," which earned her a nomination for a Pulitzer Prize. Other books by Ms. Angelou include: "Oh Pray My Wings are Gonna Fit Me Well"; "And Still I Rise"; "The Heart of A Woman"; "Shaker, Why Don't you Sing?"; "All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes"; and "Now Sheba Sings the Song."

**A COLLEGE PROFESSOR NOW**  
 In the past, she had edited a newsweekly published in Cairo, Egypt and continues to write articles, short stories and poems for national periodicals. She currently is a Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where I plan to see her again at National Black Theatre Conference this summer of August, 1989.

**PORTLAND ARTS & LECTURES PRESENTS**  
 Maya Angelou returns to town, after three years, during Black History, '89, at the invitation of the Portland Arts & Lectures Series. Under producers, Julie Mancini and Phil Otum, a sellout crowd gathered at First Congregational Church last Thursday night, February 23rd, to see and hear Angelou present her poetry, storytelling, the poems of Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Edna St. Vincent Malay, Ann Spencer (19th century black poet), Mari Evans (current black woman poet, living in Indiana) and many others.

Dressed in an elegant black sequin-topped gown, she turned pages slowly as she moved smoothly from side to side and wiped her brow gently as she eased carefully through her poems of self-love, that stated: "If I have the luck to be Black on a Saturday night" and "Poem for old Black men." (A good actress can get away with almost anything.) I remember great lines that rocked the SRO (standing room only), mainly white house, learning about Black History, such as the one from the poem of Mari Evans, "Where have you gone with the rent money." She gave us Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Little Brown Baby with sparkling eyes," "Masks," Ann Spencer's "Letter to my sister" and Langston Huges' poem, describing the rich tapestry of people of color in, "Harlem's Sugar Hill." Miss Angelou, as she insisted to called (when a young White woman questioner addressed her from the floor as "Maya"), gave us one of my favorite poets, Edna St. Vincent Malay's poem, stating "That is all I will do for death

"Reverend" Angelou, who was raised (3 - 13 yrs) in Stamp, Arkansas, standing in the pulpit, delivered her "sermon" in rhyme, song and moving stories, as she "preached" of love, great Black and White poetry and carried on something fierce, while slowly pulling the audience in and releasing us with such soulful moments as the piece about the man, who said: "The woman I love is fat, and chocolate to the bone. And every time she shakes, Some skinny woman loses her home."

Now I say, come back, Ms. Maya, come back, Angelou, 'cause we love to have you for 'tea and do," at the Heathman too. Write on, to "the a Trained" lady Maya, Queen of "The Blacks" and "do," and a lot of lovin' White folks too! "Jump back, like she say in the poem, jump back!" And I say, "write on, with ya "jump back" self! "Jump back" real soon, y'all hear?"

## BEHIND THE SCENES

by Lisa Collins

Where Did Todd Bridges Go Wrong: His mon says it was the drugs and Todd is now a different person, but those who have been close to Todd say it was partly his arrogance and partly a recklessness that fostered his drug habit. Nonetheless, on February 17, former actor, Todd Bridges, who co-starred in the NBC hit series "Diff'rent Strokes", will have to tell it to the judge when he answers charges of attempted murder, at a preliminary hearing. The charges stem from an incident at a Los Angeles "rock" house, in which a man shot five times, fingered Bridges as his assailant. Bridges, who pleaded not guilty, was declared a danger to the community and is being held without bond. If convicted, he could face as severe a penalty as life-imprisonment....Meanwhile Diff'rent Strokes Star Gary Coleman Filed Suit Against His Parents: Last Tuesday, in Santa Monica Superior Court, actor Gary Coleman charged that his parents (W.G. and Edmonia Coleman) and a former business adviser, Anita DeThomas, "improperly profited" from the monies he earned during his TV success, diverting the funds to themselves. The suit also alleges the trio invested unwisely and mismanaged his assets. The lawsuit did not specify what Coleman, who turned 21 just last week, will seek in damages, but did say that the actor felt his parents to have been duly influenced by DeThomas. Coleman, who's been acting since he was five, came to prominence in 1978 as Arnold Jackson on "Diff'rent Strokes", a series that had been designed just for him. Campaigning For Best Actor: Warner Bros is putting a great deal behind its thrust to have Forest Whitaker taken into consideration for an Oscar. Whitaker, who gave a brilliant performance in the movie "Bird", also already received a Golden Globe nomination for best actor. It was the first lead role for the 27-year old actor

who portrayed jazz alto saxophonist Charlie "Yardbird" Parker. Ironically, Whitaker claimed to have known very little about Parker before taking the role smokey Bares All In New Book: It is billed as Smokey's own story and details his record successes and personal failures, including the cocaine abuse that threatened his life and career. The book, slated to be released next month, and retailing for \$18.95, also tells the real story behind his wife's tragic attempts to have a child and their ultimate success with "adoption" using a newly introduced technology for surrogacy, the reasons for his break from the Miracles, and about the other women in his life and how they affected his marriage....But, Smokey isn't the only R&B star who is putting his life to paper. Gladys Knight is putting the final touches on the autobiography she's doing for New American Library, called "Contrary To Popular Opinion". Once finished, she will team up with Dionne Warwick and Patti LaBelle for a "Sisters" tour.

Short Takes: Heads turned when superstars Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson turned up to dine and no doubt, talk business at Ma Maison Restaurant in Beverly Hills....Sad to report of Anita Baker's recent miscarriage. It would have been the first child for Baker who was married on Christmas Eve. Marilyn McCoo has been meeting to discuss the possibility of a co-starring spot in an all-black version of the Broadway hit-- "42nd Street", which is being planned for a spring opening..Ben Vereen, who is the celebrity spokesman for Drug-Free America, will be honored at a congressional reception on March 7th, hosted by Senators Ted Kennedy and Orrin Hatch, for his work in advising youngsters through-out the country of the dangers of drugs and alcohol....Next week: A report on the star-studded Los Angeles premiere of "I'm Gonna Get You Sucka".

## ON THE MONEY

**CCI Hopes For Out-Of-Court Settlement With Dick Gregory:** Last October, Comedian Dick Gregory filed a federal lawsuit, accusing the directors of the nutrition company he founded-- Correction Connection, Inc. of trying to force him to sell his stock. The company's director, in turn countercharged that the comedian had incurred over \$160,000 in questionable American Express charges. Just last week, a company spokesman said that they are working towards an out-of-court settlement. At the request of Gregory's legal counsel, a prior court date had been pushed back. Recently, Gregory, who remains on the board of directors, but is not active in the company's day-to-day operations, was cited in violation of a court order that prohibits him from distributing the product, other than through mail order sales.

**Motown/Solar Merger--On Again, Off Again?** It was almost official or so everyone thought until last week talks between Motown and Solar ceased. And while, there is no official word yet as to the status of the deal, it appears that talks may once again be underway after it was reported that some irreconcilable differences between Dick Griffey and Motown had caused negotiations to sour. A Hollywood trade reported last week that the deal, which has been in negotiation now since October, had fallen through due to the inflexibility of Solar Records chief Dick Griffey. Word is Griffey, who just recently settled out-of-court a breach of contract/discrimination suit he'd filed against Warner Communications, Inc., is said to be in a financial bind.

**Model Black Businessman Sued For Misuse Of Funds In Nation's Second Biggest Credit Union Failure On Record:** A federal grand jury is now looking into the National Credit Union Administration's charges of fraud and misuse of funds against businessman Lawrence King, 44, in the failure of Franklin Community Federal Credit Union, in Omaha, Neb. The institution

was closed down by federal regulators in November of last year, after some \$37 million in funds was discovered missing. King, who had been praised for his community work and positive role model image, is now being cast as a man who used the institution's funds to finance a lavish lifestyle that included limousines, excessive personal charges, and a high-political profile. (In '84, King threw a party for several hundred Republican conventiongoers at Dallas' Southfork Ranch). Already, the empire King built, is crumbling, as he's had to sell off some personal holdings to pay legal fees that are expected to reach \$500,000. His wife, Alice, was also named in the suit. According to one Omaha insider, the black community is being very hush-hush about the matter. "It's a touchy subject. He's helped a lot of people. No one really knows what to believe."

**Dwight Gooden becomes highest salaried pitcher in baseball history:** NY Mets pitcher, Dwight Gooden, 24, became the highest salaried Met when he signed a three-year, \$6.7 million pact that could actually net him more than \$7.8 million. Terms of the agreement call for a \$500,000 signing bonus; \$2.25 million salary--1989; \$1.7 million--1990; and \$2.25 million in 1991. Among other provisions in the pact are that Gooden could receive \$100,000 if voted World Series MVP; \$50,000 if voted a playoff MVP; \$100,000 for a Cy Young Award, and \$25,000 if he is selected for an all-star game.

**Sucker Deal Pays Off:** The gamble has paid off for United Artists in its funding of "I'm Gonna Get You Sucka" --30-year old Keenen Ivory Wayans parody of the 70's blaxploitation films, starring Wayans, Jim Brown, Dawnn Lewis, Isaac Hayes and Bernie Casey. United Artists advanced Wayans \$3 million to do the film. By last weekend, "Sucka" which only this week premiered in Los Angeles, had already grossed over \$8 million. Next week: Will Emerge, the magazine targeting buppies, ever truly emerge. Find out next week.

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### PIZZA HUT ALL-STAR SOFTBALL CLASSIC RAISES \$50,000 FOR THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SICKLE CELL DISEASE



WICHITA, KS, February 23, 1989 -- The sixth Annual Pizza Hut All-Star Softball Classic held on Sunday, February 5th and televised live by NBC Sports World, raised \$50,000 for the National Association for Sickle Cell Disease (NASCD). The funds will be used for research to help bring about a cure for the deadly disease which affects more than two million Black Americans. (Pictured left to right) Dr. Nelson McGhee, immediate past chairman of the Board for NASCD; Ms. Zernona Clayton, Chairman of the Board for NASCD; Antoine Milton, National Poster Child for Sickle Cell Disease; Ms. Dorothy Boswell, Executive Director for NASCD and Steven S. Reinemund, President and Chief Executive Officer of Pizza Hut, Inc., gather around the check presented to the NASCD following the game.

The Pizza Hut Annual Softball Classic pits professional baseball stars from the National and American Leagues in a 7-inning game of slow-pitch softball. This year's game, played at the Boardwalk & Baseball amusement park in Orlando, Florida, was won by the National League 20 to 14. Andre Dawson of the Chicago Cubs was the Most Valuable Player of the game.

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