

# ENTERTAINMENT



## BEHIND THE SCENES

by Lisa Collins

**Blacks Honored By Blacks For Their Excellence In Film:** Sidney Poitier gave both a tearful and touching acceptance speech upon receiving the pioneer's award at the annually held Black Oscar Nominees Dinner. The star-studded black-tie affair is hosted by a group of East Coast black businessmen to honor the achievements of black oscar nominees who all too often leave the celebrated award ceremonies without the trophy. The group also honors those who may have been overlooked. This year, it did a little of both, presenting awards to the Academy's two, lone black nominees (Lamont Dozier for best original song and Willie Burton for best sound engineering), as well as handing out awards to Eddie Murphy and Forest Whitaker, who many think should have been nominated for his outstanding performance in "Bird,--the life story of Charlie Parker.

**Avery Brooks Moonlights At The Kennedy Center:** Avery Brooks, star of "A Man Called Hawk", recently opened his two and one-half hour, one-man show--"Paul Robeson"--at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. Turnout is expected to be near sellout for the one-month run. Meanwhile, by day, Brooks is at work wrapping up this season's "Hawk" episodes. R&B singer Valerie Simpson (of "Ashford & Simpson") will guest on the last episode to air April 29. An accomplished songwriter, Brooks (who helped to score the show's theme song) penned both of the tunes Simpson will sing in the episode--one of them, a duet.

**It's Nobody's Business But...Laker's all-pro guard Earvin "Magic" Johnson** is quoted as saying that he has never dated actress Robin Givens (as recently reported in a Supermarket Tabloid), nor does he intend to...On the home front, actress **Jayne Kennedy** is set to give birth any day now. It will be the second child born to Kennedy and her husband, Bill Overton.

**CBS Will Roll With Whoopi Goldberg In "Bagdad Cafe"** Lead: New World and CBS have teamed with New World TV for a half-hour CBS-TV sitcom based on last year's surprise movie hit--"Bagdad Cafe." The ensemble comedy was purchased by the network for the 1988-89 season. At last word, exec producer Zev Braun is now negotiating for a major name to costar with Goldberg, who stars as the proprietor of a red-neck bar in the California desert, populated by oddball barflies. The series has a 13-episode commitment. According to Braun, Bagdad Cafe "isn't your typical movie-into-series property. They're (CBS) taking a chance here. But...they can afford to be more daring because they don't have as much to lose."

**All-Star Lineup For Gala Tribute To Ella Fitzgerald:** Bill Cosby will head up an all-star tribute to jazz superstar Ella Fitzgerald. The ceremony is scheduled for April 28th, just three days after her 71st birthday. Among those set to participate are the Pointer Sisters, Patti Austin, Dionne Warwick, Clint Eastwood, and Carol Burnett. Funds from the gala will go to the Society of Singers--a group offering assistance to singers in need. A series of annual trophies to be known as "The Ellas" has been established. Of course, Ella will be first to get one. **Short Takes:** Actress-choreographer Debbie Allen is still after the title role of a film chronicling the life of famed dancer, Katherine Dunham...**Richard Roundtree nabbed a major role** in an upcoming movie called "Bad Jim" with John Clark Gable in "Bad Jim"...Aretha Franklin's next album, "Through The Storm" will be in the stores at the beginning of May. The album features a duet with "the Godfather of Soul" James Brown, who is currently serving time...And in other music news, the first cut from "2300 Jackson Street"--the long-awaited endpaper on the part of the Jackson clan--their first family effort since the Victory tour, is due out later this month. The Epic album will be released in May, with the official lineup of Jermaine, Jackie, Randy and Tito. Of course, Michael and the clan's offspring are featured on the title track...Next week: we'll go backstage at this year's Soul Train Awards.

## ON THE MONEY

(Byline=Serra Syndication)

**Gladys Knight Launches Line Of Hair Care Products:** Gladys Knight is trying her hand at business with the launching this month of Knight Nutritional Hair Care Supplements. Thus far, the new venture is comprised of 17 hair products, including shampoo curl activator, and styling gel. A skin-care and makeup line are yet to come. Said knight's Knight's [s] 27-year old daughter Kenya, who handles much of her business, the all-natural base line is "not geared toward the black hair, but we did have the black hair in mind when we formulated the product. We all use it." Ironically enough, manufacturing for the product is done in Canada (Toronto), while the main distributor is based in Las Vegas, where Knight makes her home. According to her daughter, Knight has always dreamed of doing her own hair care line, and is actually a licensed cosmetologist.

**Black Woman Sues California Lottery And Hits The Jackpot:** A California black woman, Doris Barnett, was awarded \$3 Million in her suit against the California Commission. The 54-year old nurse filed a lawsuit in L.O.s Angeles Superior Court three years ago, when a \$3 million "Big Spin" prize was denied her after her prize landed in the \$3-million slot, but seconds after being declared a winner, the ball popped out and into a \$10,000 slot. All this happened in a televised ceremony. She refused to cash the \$10,000 check that was mailed to her sometime later. Instead, she filed suit. Lottery officials argued that it was the announcer who'd made a mistake in announcing her a winner before the mandatory five-second waiting period was up. Nonetheless, at the time of this printing state lottery officials had not decided whether or not they would challenge the jury's verdict with an appeal. The California woman was also awarded \$400,000 in damages. **GM's Black Employees Ask For Redraft of \$3 Million Settlement:** Calling themselves the "Concerned Black Salaried Employees", a group representing several hundred salaried black workers at General Motors, has said they will file a petition opposing a \$3 million settlement of their affirmative action lawsuit. Calling the terms of the agreement "evasive" and not relative to their concerns, the group is hoping a federal court judge will grant their petition for a redrafting of the original settlement. General Motors is standing by the settlement, stating that it gives them the chance to "redress some perceived inequities and at the same time strengthens GM's existing systems to ensure all receive equitable treatment." A hearing on the matter is yet to be set.

**What Price--Weight Loss?** Well, former comedian turned nutritionist Dick Gregory's charges \$1,000 per week for his world-famous weight loss program. The program, personally overseen by Gregory, is available at the beachfront hotel he purchased in Florida's gulf-coast for several million dollars last fall. Meanwhile, Gregory's Slim Safe Baha-mian liquid diet formula reported sales of about \$2.5 million in 1988. **Business Briefs:** The nation's first talking black doll hit the mail-order marketplace last month. The Shining Star Doll, which was created by Vousette Miller of Fort Washington, MD, stands 25 inches tall and comes with recorded messages that recite poetry as well as historical profiles of eight prominent black women...Next week: A black sculptor battles in the Supreme Court over rights to life-sized sculpture of homeless family.

## BROADWAY BOUND REPORT



By Garland Lee Thompson

### THE NORTHWEST AFRIKAN BALLET AT THE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Bruce Smith, choreographer/drummer, like "Bruce Lee" in red tasseled-pants (colorful costumes designed by Chonitia Smith), brought the Northwest Afrikan Ballet to the Portland Center for the Performing Arts Intermediate Theatre on Saturday night, April 8th, 1989. Caton Lyles, "the lion," with his dreads and big frame (lead conga & djembe kalimba), Bruce Smith (lead djembe & conga) and Israel Annoh (on junn & conga) sounded the drum call effectively.

The scene opened at "the Marketplace" in this ideal african village (played by Black Educational Center community). It's a boy-becomes-a-man scene, who then seeks a bride. They meet and "The Next Morning" scene, it's love while the business of life in the village goes on. "Waterbearers/Kina" dances were performed by the women dancers, choreographed by Bruce Smith.

"The Boot Dance," with Michael Hall (who also danced the role of "the Young Man/Groom"), Jerome Burnette, Dwayne Golden and John Berry, who is credited with Bruce Smith, for the Boot Dance choreography, gave the large turn-out audience a good hint of the concept. But we needed the sounds and power of more energy of Africa to truly make their "brand new rubber boots" sound and feel like the actual Zulu tribemen in Southern Africa. It's always a problem for American dancers or actors unless they've been there or trained by Southern African teachers. It was a short first act of pageantry in the Young man's rite of passage, preparation for a search for a bride and a potential wedding.

The important thing that was missing during the bright, colorful concert evening (besides the some of the dancers having problems keeping beads and headdresses on), with its simple rituals of the life in an idealic African community, was the correct African singing and more drama to heighten the excitement of the theatrical event. In the first act, the "Young couple" meet again to solidify their relationship (performed by Nalaika Smith, Michael Hall and choreographed by Ruby Burns). And this new relationship gave us some small measure of a dramatic event. The question that comes to mind: Is the Northwest Afrikan Ballet Company giving us a concert with various dances or a small ballet with a simple book and dramatic plot?

(A note in the program has a picture of Egyptian Pharaoh, Akhenaton and his mother, Queen Tiy, whom the caption says, was also the mother of "the famous boy king, Tutankhamen (King Tut). It must be noted that while the great Queen Tiy raised young Tut, after the death of Akhenaton, it is not confirmed that she was his actual biological mother, but probably his grandmother and or, of course, his god-mother. We don't want to confuse our children of Black History at the Black Educational Center, now do we?)

### THE STOREFRONT THEATRE DEALS PLAYWRIGHT YEATS' SUPER HEROES

The Storefront Theatre reached into its kinky bag of theatrical tricks and came up with, "The Cuchulain Cycle," the Irish of Irish "heavy metal" mystic

five verse-plays of the apparent "father of the modern Irish Theatre, William Butler Yeats (played grandly by actor Fritz Congdon in the "Interludes" during the performance).

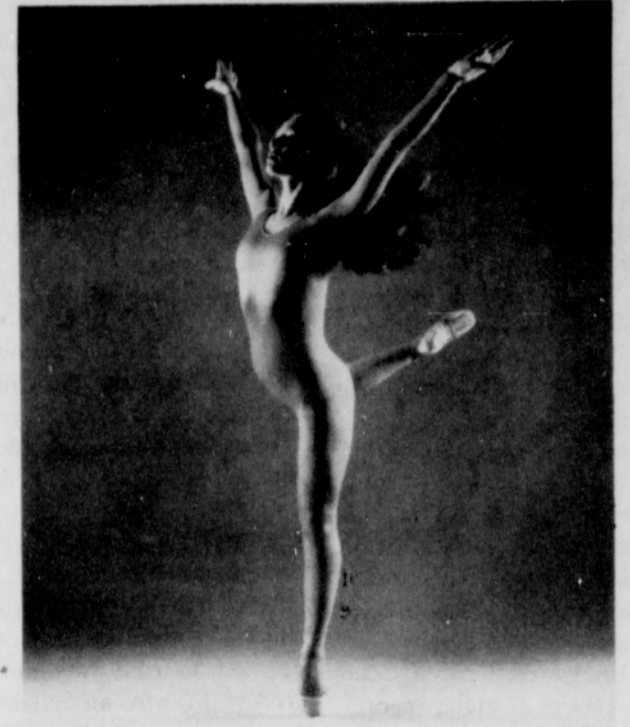
You can take your dinner or lunch to see this "full meal of theatre" (3 & 1/2 hrs) with super heroes and "she-heroes" (Vana O'Brien, Trisia Todd, Alyson Ayn Osborn and Robin Chilstrom) as gaelic as the Noh and Butoh plays are Japanese. Ric Young, who obviously believes that he was Japanese in another life, directs the opening Yeats piece, "At The Hawk's Well" (1917) in the style and form of the Japanese Noh play (as the writer intended). It makes a great mystery opener, to draw the audience into the deeply mystical "astral plane" world of bird-gods and a quest for the healing water of eternal life. The good magic stuff of which comic book super-heroes are made. The thing that didn't work for me was the fight scene that lac collision, punch and power. I thought "the bird-god, Guardian of the Well" (played by Evan Knapp) was great mime, but just appeared like it was going to get sick and "throw up" instead of fight "Chuchulain, as a Young Man" on a construction-site unhinged version of Stonehenge (by Henk Pander).

The super-hero of the second piece, "The Green Helmet" (1910) directed by Michael Griggs, even has a helmet that rolls on little wheels across the stage, remote controlled as the actors speak. Complete with comic book "pop" signs that appear for all the blood and gore "super slo-mo" fight scenes with great costumes (by Jane E. Herrold) and masks (by Rick Bartow & Daniel Fagereng. Griggs plays it for "camp" and a big "laugh-in-drag." There is a "Cat Person" with long nails, (played by Evan Knapp) in mime with no lines, at the feet of "The Red Man, A Spirit" (played by Ted Roisum, "the voice"), that really held all the mystery and threat for my taste, in this "high-camp" masquerade.

Ric Young also designed the costumes in three of the plays, one of which in "At The Hawk's Well," "blow me away," when I discovered that "The Old Man" (played powerfully by Al Strobel) had an outrageous costume with only one arm that kept me marvelling after, and trying to see how well they had covered the actor's arm. I thought, what an interesting devise, only to discover in the second play, "The Green Helmet," and the third play, "On Baile's Strand" (1904), directed by Allan Nause, that actor, Al Strobel, was playing "The Blind Man," who was also "one-armed" (the actor's true handicap). Strobel moved well and would fall all over the set and deck with incredible skill and ease. (So much for "handicap-blind" casting in this production.)

"The Death Of Cuchulain" (1939), directed by Keith Scales (Supervising Director/dramaturg, credited with the idea of entire five-play project) used the concept of the Northwest Native American dress (again costumes are by Ric Young) to close out the evening and the final play written by William B. Yeats, neats his death in 1939. The problem that I had here is the "playboy" tanktop bra-less costume for the woman, "Eithne Inguba" (played by Trisha Todd), that would offend Indian tribes and the non-climatic final dance moment that could have worked better.

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