

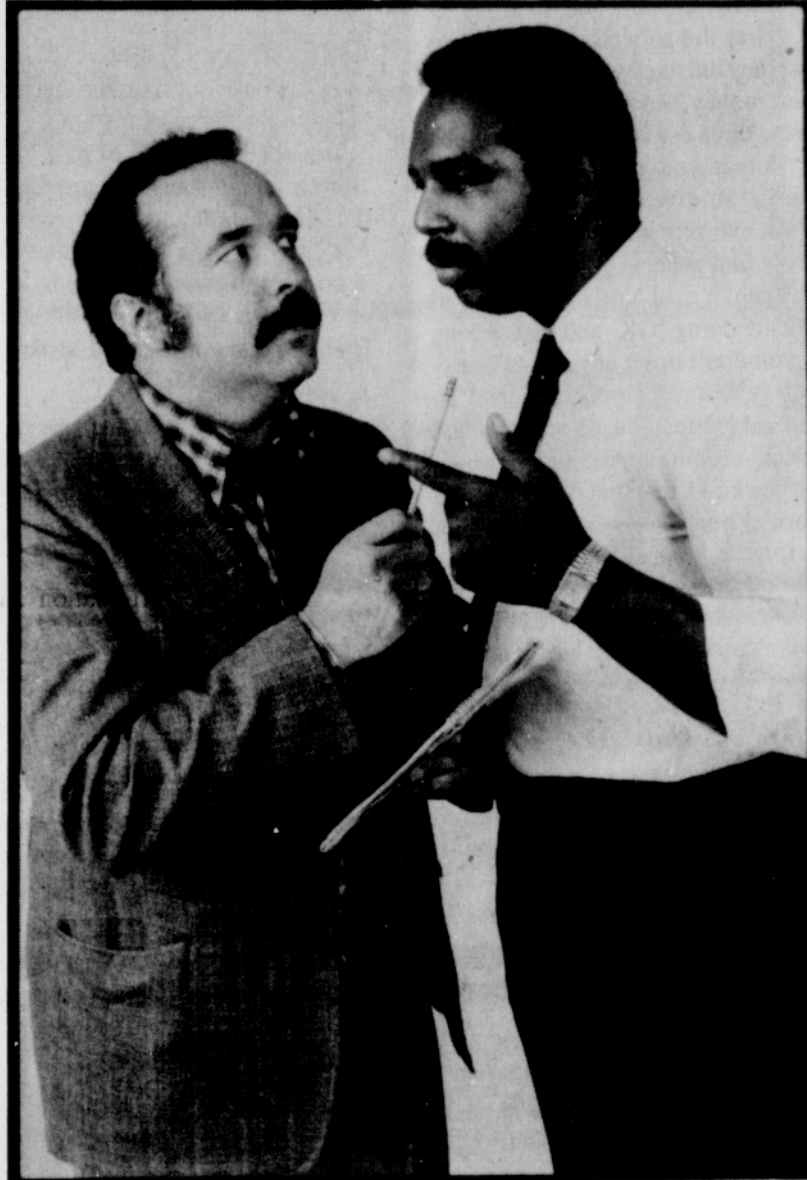
# ENTERTAINMENT

## BROADWAY BOUND REPORT

by Garland Lee Thompson

### "SOUTHERN JUSTICE" OR "JUST US"

The courtroom is a natural setting for drama since the concept of a trial by a jury of one's peers, became a working reality. The scene of Dave Kanner's new play, which I consider "a works-in-progress," Southern Justice, currently in its world premiere presentation at the Columbia Theatre Company, is just such a drama-packed case, based on the 1977 murder trial of a black youth in Fayetteville, N.C. A popular white student, captain of the football team and budding "superstar," is killed in a knife fight at the local high school, and a poor black teenager is accused of the murder. A politically ambitious black district attorney (played by Melvyn Thomas Huston) and a cynical white reporter (played by William Burger) and a crusading Black community news activist (played by Paul Jones), a tenacious white woman public defender (played by Nancy Wilson) are the featured characters in the new two-act play.



### WAS IT RACISM AND A RIGGED TRIAL?

The original trial took place in Fayetteville, N.C. (1977), in which the black high school boy, Terry McDonald was convicted of murdering a white schoolmate, a popular athlete in this Southern town. Was it racism and a rigged trial, even though the D.A. in black? The local town folks are screaming for blood, while a lone white liberal voice, an ACLU woman attorney fights the small-town system to save the accused from the cries of vengeance.

### AS A PLAY, DOES "SOUTH- ERN JUSTICE" WORK?

The playwright is trying a couple of theatrical devices in his new play, "Southern Justice." One of them is the character of the radio reporter, who is really the playwright self, who covered the original trial, and his relationship with the black community news writer. The two of them introduce, discuss, analyze and fight over the case while it is in progress, stopping the action of the trial to argue their separate points of passion and emotions. The judge (who, by the way is correct-looking in his role, even though I am missing his name from my notes) and the attorneys, all freeze in place as the "dynamic duo," verbally, "fight it out," regarding the issues of the case. The other device is the absence of the defendant, young McDonald, who never appears during the trial play. The problem that I have here, is that I, as the audience have a very difficult time trying to relate to this character or feel anything for him because he is not there. We do not hear his side of the story or get a clear sense of him or who he is. I simply don't really care for him emotionally or the case, mainly

due to the fact that he is no where to be found, theatrically speaking. This maybe the writer's deliberate intend, but does it work theatrically to enhance the drama? For my part, no, it does not if the playwright wants us, the audience truly feel something for the defendant.

Except for the reporter's role, none of the roles of the other characters show any growth, development or levels of dimension that are necessary to create a fully-rounded theatre piece. My question is: Was the piece read, workshopped and developed before the producer, the Columbia Theatre Company and the director, Gary O'Brien, decided to stage and mount it as a world premiere. I like much of the direction choices that were made, however, and the acting for the most part, is on target by all of the cast, even though I had a hard time believing the D.A. character was an attorney. This is an actor's problem that shows up when actors are lacking in training. Perhaps this really is a film concept in the beginning stages that the writer is not

traumatized and brutalized women, speaking cogently to the significance of the sex industry and experiences as its rank-and-file worker and "stars." It reminded me of a film that ran in New York, a few years ago, entitled something like, "Not A Love Story." It was also about strippers, porno queens, husband/wife teams and players, and why they did what they did for a living. This Caitin Manning film only deals with the women and "their scene" in the sex industry business.

### A WEDDING RING FOR WHOM?

"St. Catherine's Wedding Ring," directed by Debra Kahn and Dave Edelson, includes, as the NW Film & Video Center brochure indicates, "everything you wanted to know about circumcision, but were afraid to ask. This film is a very graphic, well-made, painfully, thorough, look at the rites and rituals surrounding this common world-wide practice.

The one important thing that was missing in this heavy little 23 minute film, was the fateful practice of female circumcision, as it is still been performed in certain parts of Africa and who knows where else in the world. I guess the Western world is not ready for this strangeness, in my opinion, one of the most brutal of all cultural and ancient ethnic rites of horror. "Rite on" and let's hope that it ends soon, because what some people in this mad world, do to little boys is one thing, but what they do, in the name of culture and religion, to little girls, is a hold other "ball of hot wax!" What do you think, film fans?

## SOUTHERN JUSTICE

A poor black teenager accused of murdering a rich white classmate in a small southern town. A politically ambitious black district attorney and a tenacious white public defender. A cynical white reporter and a crusading black activist. Add them all together and you have SOUTHERN JUSTICE, an intense and thought-provoking drama that will have its world premiere this summer at the Columbia Theater Company.

Based on an actual case, SOUTHERN JUSTICE explores the subtle forms of racism in our society, as well as the personal motivations and ultimate price of the choices that are made in order to further careers and assuage consciences. It's a play that practically leaps out of today's headlines onto the stage.

Written by Portland playwright Dave Kanner and directed by Portland theater veteran Gary O'Brien, SOUTHERN JUSTICE features a cast that includes William Burger, Paul Jones, Melvyn Thomas Huston and Nancy Wilson. For Kanner, this production is the realization of a dream he has relentlessly pursued for 12 years, ever since he covered the trial of Terry McDonald while working as a radio reporter in Fayetteville, NC. in 1977. Now that dream will come to pass.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Lisa Collins

**Spike Lee Denies Dogging Arsenio Hall Out:** Statements made by Arsenio Hall (that talking behind his back could lead to a ghetto ass whipping) on a recent edition of Lee Bailey's nationally syndicated "RadioScope", with regards to Spike Lee's criticism of both Hall and Eddie Murphy drew heated response from Lee. On a subsequent edition of Radioscope, Lee denied ever going behind Arsenio's back "dogging him out." Said Lee, "if anything, he tried to dog me out when I was a guest on his show...I think it's unfortunate for him to get out in the media and say he's going to kick my ass. I thought more of the brother than to say something like that. Arsenio has my number and I know he has a phone, so if he thought that way, he should have called. I mean, this is the same kind of stuff we discussed when I was a guest on his show. If he heard I was saying stuff behind his back, he should call me up, but he didn't. He's fallen prey to the same kind of stuff he was chastising me for."

**Bobby Brown's Cancellation Fallout:** Bobby Brown's recent cancellation of the final 20 dates of his tour come amidst rumors that the MCA Records superstar has been checked into drug rehab. But if you listen to those close to Brown, there are at least three reasons why you shouldn't believe his rumor. His attorney says the dates were canceled so that he can begin pre-production on his next album (which is not slated for release before the end of the year), particularly as he wants to do a great deal more of the writing. Liz Heller, MCA's vice president of artist development, implied "general burnout", in a recent LA Times article, while another MCA executive, Louil Silas maintained that Brown doesn't do drugs. Added Silas: "at what point in his career are these rumors going on virtually his entire career."

**Judge Concurrs With Reference To Actor Phillip Michael Thomas As a "Mama's Boy":** Miami Vice's Phillip Michael Thomas lost his \$14 million appeal of a libel suit against the National Enquirer as a Federal Court upheld the earlier dismissal of the suit filed by the actor, as well as his mother and brother. Thomas filed in 1987 after the tabloid reported that Thomas' brother was serving a 27-year prison term for raping three Sacramento women. A year earlier, the paper described Thomas, one of eight children, as a "momma's boy" and the child of a "welfare mother." In dismissing the suit, U.S. District Judge William Orrick ruled that the story was substantially true.

**It's A Wrap At "Ghost Dad":** Production has just wound down on the set of "Ghost Dad", which reteamed Sidney Poitier and Bill Cosby for the first time in over ten years (even though Poitier's role in the film is behind-the-scenes, as director). Denise Nicolas, who co-starred with the pair in "Let's Do It Again" and "A Piece Of The Action", once again plays Cosby's love interest. Nicolas is happy about the chance to work with Bill again. "The best work I've ever done has been comedy, and working with Bill is an opportunity to learn more about comedy and timing and precision. Because he takes such wild trips and if you're open and can go with him, it works. It's just a good chemistry." The film also features "Head Of The Class" co-star Kimberly Russell in her motion picture debut...**Short Takes:** It appears that singer Jody Watley is a prime contender for the role of Catwoman in the "Batman" sequel... "A Different World" star Dawnn Lewis is shuffling between recording studios in Chicago and Detroit putting together a demo she hopes will attract the attention of a major record company, as she's getting serious about launching a singing career...**Next week:** Is actress Jonelle Allen emerging as the "Erica Kane" of Black America with her new role on "Generations"?

## ON THE MONEY

**Bertram Lee Calls Off M&M Products Takeover Attempt:** Negotiations between M&M Products Company and Chicago businessman Bertram Lee and his Boston-based investment firm, B.B.L. Associates, involving its impending takeover of M&M,--a leading black hair care products manufacturer and distributor, have ceased. The move comes not more than two weeks after Lee led a group of black investors in the \$65 million purchase of the Denver Nuggets (making it the first minority-owned major league professional sports franchise). Industry sources believe that the move, is an effort on the part of Lee to preserve capital, but according to a spokesman there is no connection between the two business deals. Word of the much talked about takeover leaked out in May, before the deal was done. that was said to have displeased Lee, however there is as yet no official work on why he pulled out. Executives at the somewhat troubled M&M Products Company weren't talking either. Sales have declined dramatically for the Atlanta-based company, who last year ranked as the nation's tenth-largest black-owned firm, and reported sales of \$47 million in 1987. '88 sales were listed at \$20 million--less than half of the 1987 figure. M&M Products Company, founded by Cornell McBride in 1973, is the maker of "Stay Soft Fro".

**Japanese Company Halts Production of so-called "racist" doll:** Amidst charges of racism, a Japanese doll making firm has halted the production and sales of a black inflatable doll, named "Dakko-chan". Still, company officials denied that the move was made because critics had called the doll "racist". A spokesman for Takara Company, said: "It's a not black. It represents a Japanese child whose skin has darkened from being out in the sun all summer long."

**Black Woman Named To Head Top Business Group:** LaVerne Francis Collins, 43, has been appointed to head the 120,000-strong Business and Professional Women/USA. Collins, a former teen-age mother and wife, is the first black to head the powerful group, whose mission is to improve the status of working women. Collins, a human resource specialist with the Federal Aviation Administration, will concentrate on drawing more minorities into the group as well as providing resources to women who want to go into business for themselves.

**How the high cost of good health is affecting his nation's black doctors:** "No one should look as medicine as an area to go into to get rich or make a lot of money", said Dr. Carlos Sledge, a leading black cardiologist who owns and operates the Lake Meritt Heart Care Clinic in Oakland, California. "You need only read the newspapers to see that health care costs have continued to soar at 20% a year, which is 3-4 times the rate of inflation. In order to decrease it, the government has decided to decrease their reimbursement for medical care. A recent survey from the department of Health, Education & Welfare outlined a significant decrease in the financial reimbursement to doctors. The finding of that study go into effect in 1991, and we'll see a reduction in physician salaries by anywhere from 30-40%". Dr. Sledge, the first doctor in the Western United States to open a clinic offering heart services outside the hospital environment, lectures and publishes a quarterly newsletter (to over 10,000) advising of the risks of heart disease, particularly to blacks. Said Sledge, "clearly the money reward brought out the best, so blacks are going to lose a certain brain trust.

Also, it's going to hurt us dramatically, because the black doctor really has the black patient in mind. Many non-black physicians don't have anywhere near the interest. It may be a racist type comment, but it's true".

**In Short:** A recent study revealed that while the income of wives has increased twice as fast as their husbands, men remain the breadwinner in today's households. Still 5.3 million wives (18%) in two-income households, did earn more than their husbands...**Next week:** A look at the nightly take of some top black entertainers.

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