

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

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ORIGINAL DANCES BY AGNES DE MILLE DIRECTED BY CHRIS COLEMAN

Rodney Hicks as Curly and Branna Horne as Laurey in Oklahoma! Photo by Patrick Weishampel

"Things are changing. The country is changing. Gotta Change with it."
—Curly

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'Mis-Adventures' Show a Hit on YouTube Series was created to break black stereotypes

(AP) — After growing tired of watching stereotypes of people of color on the screen, Issa Rae created her own vision of reality with "The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl."

The Web-based show follows J, played by Rae, and her mishaps and successes in work and love.

"The Web series came about because I really didn't see anybody like me on the screen, nobody that I could relate to," said Rae, the show's producer, writer and director. "There's are just so many limited archetypes for black females in particular, and just people of color in general, and it's frustrating to look at the screen and only be able to relate to people like Tina Fey or Amy Poehler, people who don't look like me."

Since the series first posted online in February, the debut episode has garnered more than 240,000 hits. Subsequent episodes have received more than 100,000 hits and 1,000 viewer comments. Nearly 17,000 people are dedicated to the show's Facebook page.

Rae said she and co-producer Tracy Oliver are packaging "Awkward Black Girl" as a half-hour comedy to sell to a cable network, but are strongly thinking about keeping it online to build the audience and maintain stronger contact with viewers.

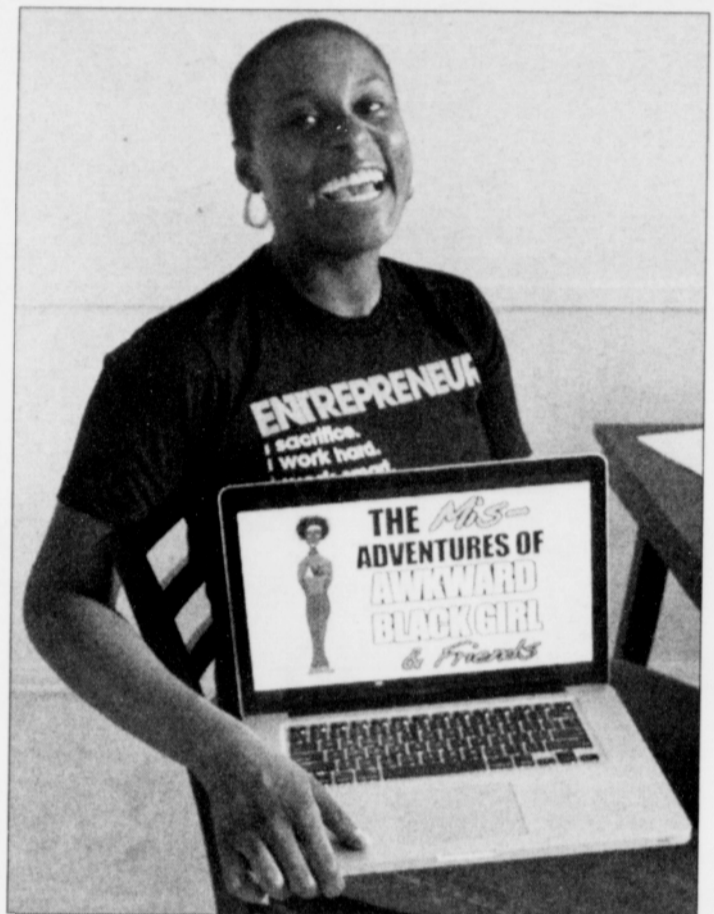
"Social media is what made the show honestly," Rae said. "Had it not been for social media, this show just wouldn't have been what it is today. I couldn't have done this 10 years ago."

Susan Fales-Hill, who produced and wrote for the long-running NBC sitcom "A Different World," called Rae's work fresh, incisive, and non-stereotypical.

"She is showing an educated, African-American woman leading an integrated life and a professional woman with friends of many different nationalities and backgrounds, and just trying to make her way," Fales-Hill said.

She said Rae's guerrilla approach to TV making is brilliant and an inspiration to veterans in the industry like her.

Rae, 26, born Jo-Issa Rae Diop, created the concept for the show two years ago while on a public theater fellowship in New York. A Los Angeles native, she didn't know anyone in New York, and that provided



Producer, director and writer Issa Rae, creator of the YouTube series "The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl," poses for a photo at her home in Los Angeles.

many awkward experiences. After returning to the West Coast, Rae gathered a few friends to help her begin shooting the series with her own camera equipment in January.

"I knew if I didn't shoot it myself it was never going to get done," said Rae, who attended Stanford University and the New York Film Academy in Los Angeles.

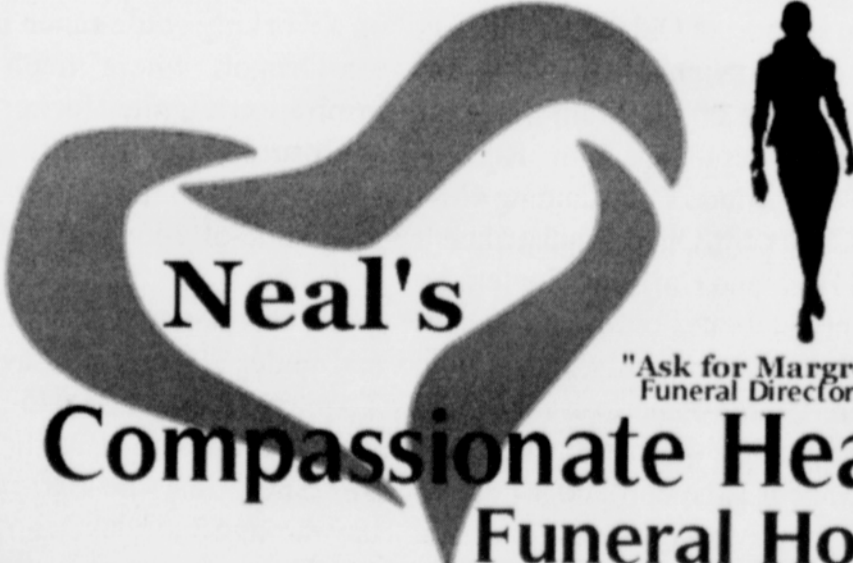
Rae recruited her friend Andrew Allan James to star as A, her annoying co-worker and admirer. The diverse cast now includes J's best friend CeCe, an Indian-American, played by Sujata Day, and her love interests White J, played by Lyman Johnson, and Fred, an African-American, played by Madison T. Shockley III.

"Diversity is important to the series just because it exists in my life," Rae said. "In real life, I do happen to have a Bengali-American best friend."

Since "Awkward Black Girl" launched, Rae has signed with United Talent Agency and 3 Arts Entertainment. She hopes her success will lead to more opportunities for minorities to tell their stories.

"I think it sends a message to mainstream media that we don't have to have these white male and female leads for everybody to relate to them," Rae said. "It's sort of unfair to think that, so I hope that this show influences future casting decisions just based off what we've been able to do so far."

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