

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Singing Herself into History

Jennifer Hudson stars in new Franklin movie

BY DWIGHT BROWN

“They want to hear you sing,” says Rev. C.L. Franklin (Forest Whitaker) to his 10-year-old daughter Aretha (Skye Dakota Turner). And she did. Eventually singing herself into 25 Grammys, a posthumously awarded Pulitzer Prize special citation and the history books.

How Franklin became the Queen of Soul and loved by millions is the subject of “Respect,” the fairly detailed and very entertaining new biofilm that charts her rise from childhood to 1972 and her making of the classic, live-recorded album, *Amazing Grace*.

This project stars Jennifer Hudson, the singer who was hand-picked by Franklin to play her. Like a Queen anointing a princess,

Franklin deemed: “I’ve made my decision, and it is you, young lady, who I want to play me.” That endorsement makes this Respect the quintessential Franklin biodrama and any others, not so much.

The movie begins in Detroit 1952, 10-year-old Aretha is a precocious musical prodigy lauded by her dad C.L., loved by her grandmother (Kimberly Scott, *The Abyss*) and envied by her siblings. Years later as a young adult in the 1960s, Franklin (Hudson) tours churches with her father who watches her like a hawk, warding off suitors.

C.L. helps his daughter land a recording contract with Columbia Records in 1960, and Franklin releases jazz/pop-orientated albums to little success. When she hooks up with hustler turned manager Ted White (Marlon Wayans), C.L. is peeved: “You are not leaving this family for that piece of trash!”

Yet this is when Aretha finds her stride. She develops her own brand

of soul music, which starts with the gospel/blues tinged “I Never Loved a Man,” recorded with the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Band on Atlantic records in 1967. The rest is soul music history.

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Jennifer Hudson stars as Aretha Franklin in the new biofilm that charts how Franklin became the Queen of Soul and loved by millions.



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