

# entertainment

## Album Tracks 'A Soldier's Story' Packs Punch

by Winfred Cross  
Staff Writer

Culture Club and Boy George will certainly be remembered as a very colorful as well as talented group. But the group's third album, "Waking Up With The House On Fire," barely gets warm enough to cause smoke damage, much less burn down a house.

There are no real bad songs on the album but there are few real good ones. "The War Song" has a catchy enough rhythm to lift it out of mediocrity. "The Medal Song" sounds like "Karma Chameleon," except with a heavier accent on a calypso beat. "Don't Talk About It" is "It's A Miracle" part II. That's ok! "It's A Miracle" is one of their best songs, and this song doesn't do any damage to the original.

The album's best song is "Mistake No. 3," a gorgeous ballad that gives the Boy a chance to sing. It is by far one of his best vocal performances to date.

The rest of the album is lackluster. The biggest problems with this album is that it comes to soon after the multi-platinum "Color By Numbers." Its very hard to follow an album that good this soon with something as good. The guys missed the mark this time but not by much.

(A Soldier's Story is currently playing at the Ram Triple in Chapel Hill.)

by Kevin Washington  
Assistant Editor

Black films are rare.

And excellent Black films are impossible to find.

But Hollywood (in general) and Columbia Pictures (in particular) may have done something right this time-- whether on purpose or by accident--in producing the season's powerful, riveting drama *A Soldier's Story*.

Based on Charles Fuller's Pulitzer Prize winning play, *A Soldier's Story* is a mystery masterpiece told with passion, humor and horror. The ensemble acting is probably the best seen in theatres this fall and the work in *A Soldier's Story* should bring in a number of academy award nominations for both those on and off screen.

The story opens in 1944 in a little redneck Louisiana town near a Black army base. Drunken Technical Sergeant Vernon Waters (Adolf Caesar) staggers out of a local dive on his walk back to the base. As he aimlessly wanders home, someone pumps two 45 caliber slugs into his chest.

Several weeks later, Captain Richard Davenport (Howard Rollins),

a Howard University-trained army attorney, shows up in the backwater town as the official investigative officer.

Through a series of interviews with the men in Waters' platoon, Davenport gathers clues, but more importantly recreates the character of Vernon Waters.

The script, which was written by Fuller, is entertaining. There are no slow moments in the story and the flavor of the period, captured on stage by the playwright, is brought to the screen successfully.

The movie's flavor is also enhanced by the music. Although Herbie Hancock's soundtrack is weak, the Blues pieces performed by Patti LaBelle and Larry Riley (who wrote several of the songs) are beautifully done. LaBelle's voice has rarely been used for such good material--it's a nice change from her 'so-so' soul.

Director Norman Jewison has also pulled together a fine cast and skillfully translated the play into an excellent screen tale.

But, the ensemble acting is the most powerful part of the movie--it is, in a word, unbelievable. Many of the actors have stepped from the stage version, produced by the Negro

Ensemble Company, into the movie bringing with them acting talent rarely seen on film.

Caesar and Rollins are fantastic. Their presence in almost every scene is what makes *A Soldier's Story* so engaging. Caesar, who played Waters in the stage version, *A Soldier's Play*, won an Obie and a New York Drama Desk Award for best supporting actor. His work in a *A Soldier's Story* is undeniably the best acting in film this year.

Rollins, who previous role as Colehouse Walker in *Ragtime* which should have won him an Oscar for best supporting actor, returns to the screen in full force. His Davenport is a lesson in Black pride and should net him an Oscar in April.

Both Larry Riley and Denzel Washington (*NBC's St. Elsewhere*) as Private Melvin Peterson, also give memorable performances. Washington, who originally created the role of Peterson in the stage version, does his best work yet.

Possibly, the success of *A Soldier's Story* (and even Prince's *Purple Rain*) will enlarge the number of Black films produced by larger film studios. If not, maybe Black film producers will try to capture a part of the film market with their own quality Black films.

## Bubbling Brown Sugar Rocks NCCU

by Rhonda Hubbard  
Managing Editor

The North Carolina Central University Drama Department was in rare form a couple of weeks ago when they performed Rosetta Lenoire and Lofton Mitchell's musical review "Bubbling Brown Sugar." The show, which is the first in the University's Diamond Anniversary year, was magnificent.

Every aspect of the show was energetic and entertaining, from the choreography to the brilliant light show in the finale.

The Eagle Ensemble, noted for its past productions of "Death and the King's Horseman," "For Colored Girls Who've Considered Suicide when the Rainbow Isn't Enuf" and "Black Nativity," placed itself on the map with the first amateur production of "Bubblin'" since the Broadway show opened in 1975.

The musical odyssey about Harlem was skillfully directed by Karen Dacons-Brock. She has developed the right formula for showcasing the talent which is available to her. The entire company under her astute direction gives the show everything it needs to sustain the energy set by the opening number, "Bubbling Brown Sugar."

Dacons-Brock has chosen excellent production assistants as well. Kaye Sullivan's choreography is one half the energy equation which makes the show work. All of the routines were works of art, and the tap dance finale "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" was worth the price of admission alone.

But, the other half of the show's spectacular energy equation was the singing. "Bubblin'" most of all is a musical and musical director Ben Keaton pulled every ounce of vocal enthusiasm from each performer in the show. Rarely is the singing in a college musical flawless -- and when it is, it's part singer, part coach. Keaton deserves a hand.

Casting can make or break a play -- and this cast was out of sight. At the top of my list for Tony Award nominations was Gregory Staplefoot, the rambunctious Checkers. 'He's got star quality,' as they say. A singer by trade, Staplefoot has comfortably adapted to the stage. His humorous "Nobody" and "(Brother, If You Wanna Spread Light) You Better Pray for the Lights to Go Out" are the kind of things a singer wants to put on his resume, and his performance did them justice.

Next on my list is Kelvin Allen as Checker's vaudeville partner Sage.

Allen's remarkable portrayal of Lester Young in "The Resurrection of Lady Lester" on the NCCU stage last fall placed him at the top of the list of high quality student actors in the Triangle.

His performance in "Bubblin'" keeps him at the top of that list. An actor by trade, Allen's powerful voice enhanced several excellent pieces.

"Savior Faire's" Rose Williams couldn't be left out of a Tony Award nomination list. As Irene Page, the senior English major from UNC-CH performed with her melodious soprano voice. Her "There'll Be Some Changes Made" and "Ain't Misbehavin'" were two of the evening's high spots.

Donna Buie and Gregory Wade as the young couple who experience the Harlem of 50 years ago first-hand are excellent on stage. Both Buie and Wade complemented each other and worked well. Wade, Buie and Allen's "Harlem Makes Me Feel" and Buie's "I Got it Bad" establish the actress as a singer.

Kevin Dill as Bill "Bojangles" Robinson also stood out -- his intricate tap dance routine in the finale brought the house to its feet.

Special mention goes to Constance Prince, one of the Triangle's premiere jazz and Gospel singers. Prince, who

brought down the house with a Gospel Medley in the first act, has been a powerhouse for some time. Her performance in "Bubblin'" was quite enough for me to eagerly watch for her next engagement.

The rest of the cast delivered a fine ensemble performance. The ensemble songs and dances matched the calibre of the solos and duets.

The fantastic musical work by Brother Yusuf Salim, Millard Bell and Shawn Buckward was also well worth the price of admission. Their work was not only flawless but made the energy equation an unqualified success. Brother Yusuf, hot off the road show of "Ain't Misbehavin'," has proven once again that Black musicals in the Triangle could never be satisfying without him.

A special note -- NCCU's production of "Bubbling Brown Sugar" is currently entered in the American College Theatre Festival -- a dramatic arts contest for special grants, scholarships and awards. One of the 470 productions entered will perform in the Spring 1985 in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

If you missed "Bubbling Brown Sugar" this time around, you might look for the Eagle Ensemble in D.C. next spring.