

BEHIND THE SCENES

With LISA COLLINS



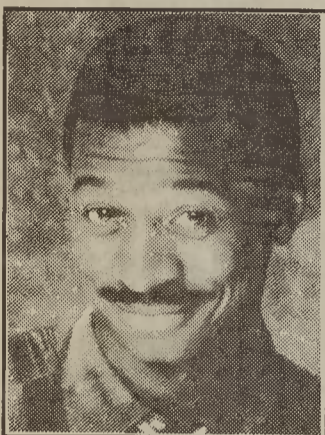
Changing For The Better? Nell Carter joins the cast of "Hangin' With Mr. Cooper" this fall. This is

After four years, TV talk show host Arsenio Hall and Willis Edwards, past president of the NAACP-Hollywood/Beverly Hills Chapter shook hands and put an end to their differences. It all started when Edwards criticized Hall's hiring practices of minorities. Hall fired back, calling Edwards (among other things) an "extortionist." Hall countered with a \$10 million lawsuit charging libel and slander. Recently, the two settled their differences in a private, court-ordered mediation session. After it was all over, the two emerged with an agreement they hammered out without attorneys. Neither has discussed terms of the settlement. A trial date, set for August 12, has been cancelled.

On the home front: Whoopi Goldberg got a reported \$2.2 million for the recent sale of her Malibu home. She's moved closer into Los Angeles in the posh community of Pacific Palisades where she's purchased a five-bedroom, 7,000-square foot house she's been leasing since January...

not known just much Leonard paid. But it sounds like he may be getting his money's worth with the 10,000 square-foot mansion, featuring six bedrooms, a solarium, game room, wine cellar, pool and spa with a lighted fountain, tennis courts, mountain and ocean views, security and orchid houses. The 37-year old former boxer is now beefing up his image, apparently looking to pursue an acting career. Leonard just produced a workout video for women and is featured in an upcoming video game called "Legends Of The Ring."

Risky Business: Members of the rap community are crossing their fingers that all goes well with Dr. Dre's "Chronic Tour" which gets underway this week in To-



TOWNSEND

do, Oh. Consensus is that the future of rap tours-particularly hard-core rap packages, hinge on its going smoothly, without any of the violence that has scarred such tours in the past. Venues in some major markets (like Los Angeles) have passed on the show. The tour also features Run-DMC, the Geto Boys and Snoop Dog.

...By the way: Whitney Houston is keeping with her promise to get into gospel, with the management of the youngest Winans siblings--Angle & Debbie, through her Angelway Productions, Inc. The talented sister act opened this week with Houston on her national tour...In other tour news, the funky divas--En Vogue--are set to open for Luther Vandross on his upcoming national tour...August 16 is the latest date set for the release of Robert Townsend's "Meteor Man." (The movie was originally scheduled for release this past March.)

Next week: Find out what Mark Curry thinks of the changes the ABC-TV series Mr. Cooper is going through.



SYMONE

one of several much publicized developments coming out of ABC over the last couple of months. The biggest surprise had been the departure of Dawnn Lewis, who had always spoken in glowing terms about the show. The official reason for her leaving was "mutual consent." Then there was the announcement that former Cosby show kid Raven Symone would be joining the cast. Now with the latest change, Carter hopes to generate some tension as the new principal that Mr. Cooper will go toe-to-toe with. Producers of the show, which was rated among the top 20 last season, are said to be trying to make it more of a family show, while toning down its sexual undercurrents. And they're not through yet. They're looking to cast yet another pivotal role: That of Mr. Cooper's female cousin who will become the second roommate. (Raven Symone was cast as her daughter). However, the biggest change of all just might be the new Friday night time slot (9:30) ABC executives are putting it in.

Making Up Is Hard To Do:



GOLDBERG

Among her new neighbors will be Sugar Ray Leonard and his fiancée Bernadette Robi, who have also decided to make their home in Pacific Palisades. The two are planning to wed in a posh ceremony in August. In the meantime, Leonard has purchased a two-acre estate in the Palisades. The estate was initially listed at \$10.5 million. It is

Laurel Avenue Debuts Sat.

By Jackie Hyman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES - To direct a realistic miniseries about an African-American family, it helps to have the right script and actors and to be an accomplished filmmaker.

It also helps if you're a father.

"Being a father is part of it," said Carl Franklin, who directed the two-part HBO production of "Laurel Avenue," the story of an extended working class family in Minneapolis-St. Paul. "Directing is a very paternal-maternal process."

Having two teen-age children affected the way he visualized the younger characters, Franklin said, and also made him a better director.

"There was a time when I would have insisted everything conform to what was in my mind at the beginning," he said of his evolution as a director, following a long acting career. "Directing, like fatherhood, is taking the best of things and allowing them to run and grow."

"Laurel Avenue," a slice-of-life story that takes place during one weekend, premieres July 10-11 on HBO. It stars Mary Alice, Juanita Jennings, Rhonda Stubbins, Vonte Sweet and Mel Winkler.

Franklin cast his son, Marcus, 17, and daughter, Caïra, 15, in small roles after auditioning them. Marcus plays a young man named Lamar, and Caïra is a cheerleader at

a basketball game.

The work originally was planned as a series of six half-hours, but was rewritten into two longer episodes after receiving input from Franklin.

"I decided that the premise of the film is that family love leads to survival," he said. "Then, you can set up your opposition - drugs, sibling rivalry, adolescent rebelliousness, sexuality, responsibility vs. desire, expecting love vs. wanting respect."

"Little things that go on in our own personal lives that are not necessarily headline news are still big to us, and that, I think, is the vein that we're trying to tap into," Franklin said.

"It deals with such a broad spectrum of conditions within one family. Most of the time, in depicting a black family, we generally see them either depicted in a very stark urban environment where conditions are abjectly horrible... or it's the Cosby show, everything's very pristine. We're hoping to tap into something that has not been mined yet, and that is the universal values of black life."

Franklin hopes "Laurel Avenue" will appeal to a wide range of viewers.

"There's an implicit intention to reach the black audience, but I believe the American public, the general public, is interested in human values," he said. "Overall, I want to reach the audience in general, but I

think the only way to do that with ethnic material is to deal with the ethnicity. If you homogenize it, if you dilute it, you're offering them nothing."

He also believes the wider community shares the concern that materialism has distracted many people from deeper values.

"The advertising industry has created such a discontent with what you have," Franklin said. "They tell you you smell bad, you need another deodorant; that piece of furniture is getting old, you should get new furniture; that car is getting old, you'd better get another car."

"You're always in a situation of being unhappy with what you have," he said. "I think 98 percent of us are neurotic because of it."

A native of the San Francisco Bay area, Franklin studied history and dramatic arts at UC Berkeley. He began his career on the East Coast, acting with the New York Shakespeare Festival, then moved to Los Angeles.

He appeared as a regular on three television series: "Caribe," "Fantastic Journey" and "McClain's Law." He also made recurring appearances on "The A-Team."

In 1986, he entered the American Film Institute and earned a masters degree in directing.

"I don't know what my motives for being an actor were, and it got to the point where I wasn't doing a lot that was

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United Negro College Fund

William Gray has launched a new career. After 12½ years in the U.S. Congress, he is now President and CEO of the United Negro College Fund. The 48-year-old organization supports 41 private, historically Black colleges and universities that enroll over 51,000 students, many of whom receive UNCF financial assistance.

Ideally suited to lead the College Fund, Gray is working to ensure that education is our country's number one priority.

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