

LISA COLLINS

Behind the Scenes



One on one with James Earl Jones: The first motion picture to be made in the newly democratic South Africa, "Cry The Beloved Country" - starring James Earl Jones and Richard Harris - is the powerful and moving

an earlier preacher he portrayed, Rev. Vernon Johns, in a made-for-TV movie, "The Vernon Johns Story." Johns, he

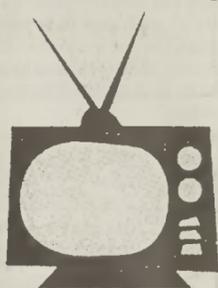
From his latest film, Jones hopes people learn "the value of reconciliation. "Five years ago", he maintains, "this movie wouldn't have caught

religious views. He will say he's Catholic, though he doesn't attend Mass. Fact is, life is getting to be pretty simple for the 64-year-old, Tony and Emmy award winning actor who is also an Oscar nominee. Raised on a farm, he and his wife now have a place in the woods where he spends a great deal of time - when he's not working - and is getting to be a pretty good shot. So good in fact that he's having a special rifle crafted for shooting targets.

"My life," he reports, "is so simple and so ordinary that there's nothing I could say that would be surprising to anybody." (Yeah right!)



King



Jones

declares, "was a preacher that I unequivocally would like to count myself of his flock. He was a boat rocker but he was also a great intellect...great scholar. He believed in education and we have nothing without that. We haven't built up the kind of economic power base where you pass on your good monies to your children and they have it easy and they add to that money so we lack a certain kind of power and we can't get any power without education." But Jones is hardly the activist, stating "if kids ask me how to be an actor, I tell them to get an education first, though it might never be used. It's the conditioning you put your mind through that is going to help you."

Jones never met Johns, who was fired from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. for his somewhat militant civil rights activism and subsequently replaced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King is another favorite topic for Jones, who is more than honest in saying, "I didn't like the style of the early Martin Luther King. I thought the speech should be a little more direct. There was too much 'amen' and 'right on brother'. At least I thought that. I wanted to hear what he was really saying. It wasn't until J. Edgar Hoover started portraying him as something other than what we thought he was that I got curious. If King was a philanderer...well, I'm curious now," Jones smiles. "Maybe he was human. Then I started listening to his sermons. I got the point of his style. And I mainly got his message and it was beautiful."

tale of two fathers, one black and one white, bound by the loss of their sons.

In the tragic twist of fate, one man's son has murdered the other's son. In a nation shattered by racial hatred, two men struggle to come to terms with their grief, the reality of a divided country, and each other. Jones' character, Rev. Kumalo, is a quietly ordered priest. Jones, in fact, has a kind of affinity for preachers, noting "the first actor in my family was my father's dad. He was what we call a jackleg preacher, which meant bootleg. He wasn't ordained. He just got his Bible and his message and that was it." An interview with James Earl Jones is much more conversation than questions. An astute conversationalist, he handles his mind like a finely-tuned, analytical machine. "I couldn't sit and talk to you unless I sized you up and figured out who you are," he later tells me. "It took me about five seconds but I sensed where your soul is at. Your spirit. We all have that ability. Most of us lose it as children, but it's something actors relearn." In talking, one gets the impression however that the role, for which he is winning critical acclaim, is not one of his favorites. And that while he has compassion for and a clear understanding of his character, it is far removed from him. Instead he turns to

anybody right, but today, it catches both societies right - South Africa as it's coming together and (the U.S.) as we seem to be coming apart. It speaks of a resolution to people in conflict - be it religious, the races or age, the sexes. If we don't learn to resolve, we're all going to die as a humanity." Jones doesn't discuss own

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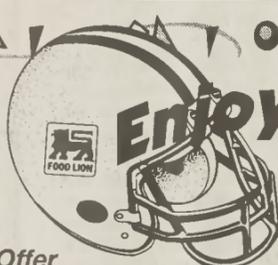
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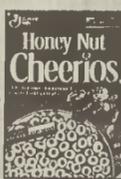


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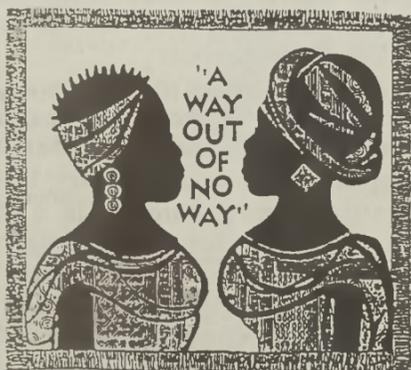
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