

5B ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Rome debut CD is worth a listen



By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Rome
Rome
Gerald Baillergeau
and Victor Meritt,
producers
RCA

☆☆☆

Black radio needs another new male vocalist like Dennis Rodman needs another tattoo. Thank goodness Rome isn't just another male vocalist.

No, he's not a great singer - he doesn't have a whole lot of range - but he's an honest singer. Rome sings with a clear voice, both figuratively and literally. He sings without over embellishment, no vocal gymnastics or wretched over singing that is taking over the air ways.

Rome's material isn't much different from stuff you hear every day, but at least his approach is. His producers smartly layer his voice, which builds layers of harmony, much the same way Marvin Gaye did. Also like Gaye, he sings about sexy subjects, but comes across more as the boy next door than a roaming Casanova. When he sings something as sweet as "I Gotta Be Down," which speaks of sacrifice and commitment, you believe him. Even when he lapses into "Do Me Right," basically a "booty call," he still sounds honest.

Most of this CD is ballad-based and it tends to get a bit tedious. A few up tempo tunes would have done the trick. Still, if Rome keeps singing songs as well as he sings Bobby Womack's "That's The Way I Feel About 'Cha," that's all his fans will want to hear.

Wu-Tang Clan
(Featuring
Cappadonna)
Triumph
The Rza, producer
Loud/RCA/BMG
Records

☆☆1/2

There's a heck of a lot of street buzz about Wu-Tang Forever, the double CD sophomore effort from Wu-Tang Clan which is set for release June 3. If the first single is any indication, it will be a monster hit. "Triumph" bounces along with a menacing, head-nodding beat (which is similar to one used by Scareface on The Untouchable) and spine-tingling lyrics, which display a bit of growth. The single is heavily edited for radio play, but the full-length CD is not.

Christopher L. Gray
and
The North Carolina
Mass Choir
Great Things!
Christopher L. Gray,
producer
CGI Records

☆☆1/2

Half-way into Chris Gray's new CD and I finally discover what's odd about it. The N.C.

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Def Jam comics delight Ovens audience

By Mark Pendergrass
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

On Friday, the Russell Simmons Def Comedy Jam show came to Ovens Auditorium with all the laughter, excitement and side-splitting jokes it provides on Home Box Office.

Like the late night comedy extravaganza on cable television, there was no language

barriers or FCC restrictions during the two-hour show which highlighted the talents of some of the hottest African-American comedians in the country. Hosting the show was BET Comic View host Somore, who also appears regularly on various tapings of Def Jam. She was introduced by WPEG Power 98 DJ Nate Quick.

According to several attendees, the freedom of speech is



Somore



From left to right: Zoo Man, Kld Capri, Joe Clair, Somore, Mike B and Def Comedy Jam associate producer Bob Sumner. Mike Epps is kneeling.

one of the reasons people come to see the show.

"I think it's all part of the comedy," said South Carolina native Trina Jones. "The comedians are really displaying their talent and their talent is

what makes the audience amused. The language doesn't bother me because it's all entertainment."

Opening the show was BET's host of the video show Rap City, Joe Clair. This comedi-

an/video disc jockey entertained the audience with his performance of TV sitcom songs. The crowd participation enabled Clair to clown

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Romantic comedy 'Sprung' falls short of its premise



Movie Review

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Sprung
Tisha Campbell, Rusty Cundieff, Paula Jai Parker, Joe Torry, John Witherspoon, Jennifer Lee and Clarence Williams III
Rusty Cundieff, director
Trimark Pictures
Rated R
Now showing

☆☆

There's a point in "Sprung."



PHOTO/TONI SCOTT

Joe Torry gets a ride from Paula Jai Parker in the Trimark film "Sprung," now in theatres.

black themes - gang bangin', violence, drugs - and goes for romance. But it falls a bit flat and is destined to be an also-ran.

Montel, a wide-eyed romantic who gets tongue-tied when trying to express his feelings towards women. He falls for Brandy (Campbell) a law clerk with higher aspirations. The relationship blossoms and they become a couple.

They have two big problems: Adina (Paula Jai Parker), a hoochie and Clyde (Joe Torry), a wanna-be playa. Each is jealous that their friends may have found Mr. & Ms. Right. So they cook up outlandish schemes to break them up.

I'll give Cundieff credit, he has a good premise. Mix buddy comedy with heart-warming romance and you have a winning combination. The problem is the comedy is bawdy but not all together funny. The fast-paced over-the-top sex scenes between Adina and Clyde are cliched, but Torry and Parker breath life into them with funny facial expressions. The film also seems a tad longer than the 1 hour and 45 minute running time.

The romance is so-so. Cundieff and Campbell are a good looking couple on screen, but their dialogue often sounds forced. It's almost as if each is trying too hard to make the relationship seem unlikely, not destined to happen. Even when the mood gets romantic, something doesn't seem real. The scenes seem to drag on. Cundieff may have bitten off a bit much in starring and directing the film.

Parker and Torry seem perfectly cast as the antagonists. Torry isn't a great actor but he works well as the hapless Clyde who has no rap, no game and, as we find out, no



PHOTO/TONI SCOTT

Rusty Cundieff and Tisha Campbell try to find true love in "Sprung."

Porsche. He delivers the film's funniest lines, none of which I can repeat in this column. The role also gives him the opportunity to be just about naked in most of the first half of the film. Parker is a scream as Adina, a role which can be looked at as demeaning were it not balanced by the Brandy character. The special effects used to show off her ability to scope out fake Rolexes and cheap suits are too funny.

"Sprung" is no where as stupid as "Booty Call," but it does lack the romantic spark of something like "Love Jones." Still, it's worth a look-see.

Rating:

☆☆☆☆ Classic;
☆☆☆☆ Excellent;
☆☆☆ Good;
☆☆ Fair;
☆ Why?;

No stars given - A mess

Blues tour rides on freeway in pink '55 Cadillac

By Woody Baird
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLARKSDALE, Miss. - "My nickname's Sonny, but my friends call me Rat."

With that introduction, Frank Ratliff takes blues fans through the old, beat-up Riverside Hotel in Clarksdale. It's where singer Bessie Smith died and a young Ike Turner and his band practiced in the basement.

The Riverside was popular

with black blues musicians in the days of racial segregation, and it's a favorite now with travelers on the American Dream Safari.

The Safari, traveled in a pinkish-beige '55 Cadillac, begins in Memphis, and takes a winding, change-it-as-you-want route through the birth ground of the Delta blues and rock 'n' roll.

"What I'm looking for is the quintessential American experience," said Tad Pierson,

Safari creator and honky-tonk guide.

He knows the back roads and the beer joints. And there are stops, too, at the Riverside, which was a small hospital when Smith was brought there after a traffic accident in 1937.

Turner, bluesman Robert Nighthawk and many other musicians, passing through or from the region, were welcomed to the Riverside by Ratliff's mother, Mrs. Z.L. "Mama" Hill, who bought the

building in 1944. She died recently at age 90.

Pierson's travelers also stop off at places like Ruth and Jimmie's Sporting Goods and Cafe for coffee and peach cobbler, or the Rev. Willie Morganfield's church for some gospel music and prayer.

The Rev. Morganfield is a cousin of McKinley Morganfield, better known to blues fans as Muddy Waters. Pierson conducts tours around Memphis as well as

day trips down into Mississippi. But his real love is taking music fans on three-, five- or seven-day excursions through the Delta, with the longer ones winding up in New Orleans.

Tooting around in that Caddy with the stereo cranking, Pierson tries to match his trips to customers' tastes. Some want the usual sights like Elvis Presley's Graceland or B.B. King's club on Beale

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