

1D ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Jackson
Despite changes, Jackson has support

By Nekesa Mumbi Moody
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — His once broad nose has been surgically whittled to the size of a pencil. His formerly brown skin is now off-white. His woolly afro has been replaced by a sleek, straightened 'do.

Michael Jackson's physical transformation — along with his two marriages to white women — has led to questions about his standing in the black community. But since his arrest on child molestation charges, some blacks have reacted as if a family member were in handcuffs.

Even though Jackson and some other black stars "seem like they hang around with white folks all the time, even though they distance themselves from us seemingly, at the end of the day, we still claim them," says Jamie Foster Brown, publisher of the celebrity monthly magazine Sister 2 Sister. "Because when black people get in trouble, white people tend to look at the whole race anyway."

Jackson certainly has plenty of black detractors, as well as non-black supporters like his friend Elizabeth Taylor. But judging by the response to his arrest from chat rooms, radio broadcasts and man-on-the-street conversations, there is more willingness in the black community to give Jackson the benefit of the doubt.

"I did a vigil," said Audrey Martin, a 58-year-old retired home care attendant from Fairfield, Calif. "He can't change that he's black. He's black whether or not he wanted to get rid of the black nose."

"African-Americans have had an extremely negative experience with the criminal justice system," says Roland Martin, founder and editor of the Web site BlackAmericaToday.com "We more than anybody else believe in innocent until proven guilty."

There has been a tinge of suspicion that the allegations against Jackson are about more than child abuse. Jermaine Jackson likened his brother's arrest to a "lynching."

It's a sentiment similar to when O.J. Simpson was charged with murder, Mike Tyson was convicted of rape, and even as Kobe Bryant's rape case proceeds.

"That's the first thing (blacks) say — the same thing with O.J. — they're trying to bring down a black man," says Brown.

Please see **JACKSON/2D**

Art, words mix for poetry impresario



PHOTO/LEE STEWART

Terry "The Wanderer" a local poet performs for renowned artist Danny Simmons at his opening at Noel's Gallery.

By Artellia Burch
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Painter/author Danny Simmons was in Charlotte for the opening of his exhibit, "Def-intely Simmons" at Noel's Gallery at 401 N. Tryon.

Local poets kicked off the opening by honoring Simmons, an organizer of the "Def Poetry Jam" enterprise.

Simmons' name isn't as well known as his younger brothers, rap mogul Russell and Joseph ("Rev. Run") of Run-DMC fame. However, Danny is one of New York's most respected visual artists and a dynamic creative force.

While in town, Simmons went to "Def Poetry Jam" at Blumenthal Theatre. He is a consultant to "Def Poetry Jam" on HBO and "Def Poetry Jam on Broadway," which earned him, along with his brother Russell a 2003 Tony Award.

"I have seen the show a number of times," Simmons said. "I have also seen it on Broadway. But no matter how many times I see these kids perform the same work I still get a same rush."

Although Simmons' work is displayed across the country, he takes more pride in creating platforms for other artists. Along with helping start "Def Poetry Jam" he

owns two galleries, one in Brooklyn and the other in Manhattan that show the works of other artists. He is also the founder and vice-president of Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, a non-profit organization with a focus on arts-in-education for children. The foundation has given millions of dollars to promote creative arts.

"Creating a venue for other artists is more important to my people than creating a venue for my own work," Simmons said. "I'm one voice. But if I can create a place where more voices are heard it's more important than a singular voice. I have always felt that way."

"To provide and create a platform

for people to express themselves is necessary. In fact it's more necessary to create a platform for others than it is for me to create art myself. To give other people the opportunity is the greatest calling on my life. Now because of 'Def Poetry Jam,' poetry is considered a creative vehicle. It's really gratifying."

The Simmons brothers grew up to be gigantic forces in arts and music. Russell is co-founder of Def Jam Records and founder of Phat Farm. Joseph was one of the pioneers of hip-hop. His group was one of the first to earn crossover appeal with their hit "Walk This

Please see **LEAST/2D**



caption

By Christie Lemire
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — You better watch out: The ads for "Bad Santa" suggest that it's a

wacky holiday romp.

Far from it: The movie is relentlessly dark. It's also infinitely funnier than you'd expect.

At the Movies: 'Bad Santa'

Director Terry Zwigoff proves again, as he did with "Ghost World" (one of the best films of 2001), how acutely observant he is of human quirks. And Thornton proves again, as he's done in nearly every film he's ever

REVIEW made, that he's not afraid to play a miserable character.

There's nothing likable about Willie, a part-time department store Santa Claus and full-time alcoholic con man. Yet he's strangely irresistible — to his reluctant partner (Tony Cox), a midget who dresses as an elf; to a bartender (the sexy, adorable Lauren Graham) who happens to have a Santa fetish; and to a chirpy, cherubic boy (Brett Kelly) who truly

believes Willie is Kris Kringle and clings to him as a father figure.

Willie and Marcus (Cox, best known for his memorable supporting role in "Me, Myself & Irene") go from city to city, tolerating the seemingly endless array of children who want something shiny and new on Christmas morning. But the Santa gig is merely an excuse to get inside department stores in order to crack their safes and do a little after-hours shopping on Christmas Eve.

Then they get to Phoenix, where Willie's erratic behavior raises the suspicions of the department store manager (John Ritter in his last film role) and the security chief (an underused Bernie Mac), who's a suspicious character

himself. Ritter, to whom the film is dedicated, plays the perfect uptight foil — similar to his character in "Sling Blade," in which he also costarred with Thornton.

Willie is profane and anti-social, a chain smoker who drinks so heavily, he's oblivious when he urinates all over himself. He's an unscrupulous shell of a man with no chance at redemption — not that he wants one. Thornton plays him as if he were a character in a drama, without a trace of caricature, which makes him totally believable.

Somehow, Willie stumbles into a cushy life when he moves in with a chubby, insecure boy whose wealthy father is in prison; the only

Please see **MOVIE/2D**



Michael Jackson
No. Ones
Various producers
Epic Records



I know it's not popular to be a Michael Jackson fan these days, but I don't base my like or dislike of an artist on the amount of press that artist generates.

Jackson proves legend status with 'Number Ones'

Yes, Jackson has made some bad personal choices but it will take a jury to decide if he is guilty of breaking a law. But anyone can listen to "Number Ones" and know that Jackson is one of the greatest musical artists of all time.

Yes I can say that without thinking, "Billie Jean," "Rock With You," "Beat It" and the best dance song of the '70s "Don't Stop 'Till You Get Enough" are the basis for a stellar career. Throw in songs

from "HIStory," "Bad" and "Dangerous" — perhaps Jackson's most underrated work — and you have legacy material.

Jackson is a legend. His style and stage presence have inspired hundreds of artists to mimic him or at least borrow a few things.

Epic was smart to throw in a couple of songs from "Invincible," Jackson's last CD for the label. "Break Of Dawn" sounded as if it came from Jackson's "Off The Wall" period. "You Rock My World"

should have been much bigger than it was. I would have thrown in "Butterflies," but hey, that's just me.

"One More Chance," a song written by embattled R&B star R. Kelly, is the only new song on the collection. It's a catchy pop/R&B tune that fits Jackson's voice well. But I prefer the Paul Okenfold remix, which sounds more '60s. The amount of air play the song gets will depend solely on how brave program directors feel. Also included is a live ver-

sion of "Ben," Jackson's first No. 1 single as a solo artist.

Just on musical merit, this CD is a slam dunk. Too bad it won't be judged on merit alone.

Ratings

Classic;	☆☆☆☆☆
Excellent;	☆☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆☆☆
Why?	☆☆☆☆
No stars — A mess	☆☆