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PHOTO/WADE NASH

Singer Ron Gattis and Kathryn Mahan prepare for his solo performance with Carolina Voices. Gattis conquered drug addiction to revive his singing career that started when he was a teen.

A song of sobriety

Tenor's recovery gets a boost from Carolina Voices

By Cheri F. Hodges
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Singer Ron Gattis has come a long way since his appearance on the "Today" show 23 years ago.

But the road that took the Philadelphia native from TV to Carolina Voices' 50th anniversary is littered with drugs, prison and finally redemption.

Gattis, who has classical voice and opera training, was an up and coming lyric tenor when he was discovered by Broadway star Richard Kiley. Gattis seemed on the verge of success when cocaine abuse took its toll.

"I was strung out on coke," he said.

Gattis said he spent 13 months in prison for writing \$8,000 worth of bad checks to support his drug habit.

"While I was in prison, I needed to do something to elevate my mind, so I started writing and I reached out to my family to start a business with me as the vehicle

musically," he said.

When Gattis moved to Charlotte last August, he knew he wanted to get back into music.

He was the tenor soloist at the Daybreak of Freedom concert in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

When Gattis agreed to sing with Carolina Voices, his plans took an unexpected turn. A producer from the "Today" called to make arrangements to attend the choir's Broadway GOLD! Revue with a camera crew to film Gattis.

Twenty-three years ago, he was featured on "Today" as a street performer. In 1980s Philadelphia, he would perform with a cassette tape playing in the background and made pretty good money.

"Anyone that wants to go into music should be prepared to work harder than you have in life. I easily work

See SONG/2D

'College Hill' stirs mixed emotions at HBCUs

By Cheri F. Hodges
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BET's "College Hill" could be considered a blessing and a curse for the image of historically black colleges and universities.

The blessing: More than 1 million people tune in each week to watch the exploits of Langston (Okla.) University students Brittani, Nafiy, Stacey, Coti, Peaches (who was voted off the show midway through the season), Israel, Jon and Tanisha.

If this show has the recruiting power of "A Different World" and Spike Lee's movie "School Daze," then black colleges across the country should expect a windfall of enrollment this fall, something Louisiana's Southern University experienced, said Stephen Hill, one of the show's executive producers.

"Southern University

where we had the first season said their applications increased by double digits," he said. "And I'm sure Langston University will experience the same thing."

The show was developed by Edmonds Entertainment, which was founded by Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds and his wife, Tracey.

Hill said BET viewers wanted to see a reality show where black participants aren't tokens.

"We are thrilled that BET viewers have once again made 'College Hill' a ratings success," Tracey Edmonds said in a release. "This was an incredibly exciting season to produce largely because of our compelling cast and their eclectic personalities. Our group certainly had their share of conflict, but it was so rewarding to see how they evolved over the course of the series."

Hill said the purpose of "Col-

lege Hill" is to show viewers, especially younger ones, that going to college is cool.

The curse: the unscripted reality show has come under fire from critics for not showing the most flattering image of black students at HBCUs. According to Black America Web, some Langston alumni claim the show portrays the school in a negative light and may impact its recruiting and fundraising efforts.

The web site stated that calls from outraged alumni began coming in soon after the airing of the first episode, according to David Stevens, national president of the Langston University National Alumni Association. Stevens, whose son attends LU, said the negative depiction of the school will do more damage than good.

"HBCUs have had to fight against negative attacks on the quality of education, stu-

dent life and faculty," Steven's told BlackAmericaWeb.com. "College Hill" feeds into that negative image that many people have about HBCUs."

The show premiered Jan. 27 and all season, sex, drama and fights have been aired.

Peaches was voted off the show after she got into a fight with castmate Jon Brittani and Israel's implied sexual interlude in the bathroom caused a rift in Israel's relationship with another student, April. And Stacey was shaking her - er - tail feather on a pool table and licking whipped cream off a male student.

Hill said the students aren't meant to be representative of all black college students. "We are showing a slice of eight students' lives. The guy on the show who is most buck wild is also one of the best in his class. We also show students in class and we show the pro-

fessors and how they are professionals."

Hill said that after season one of the show, it got tougher to get universities to allow the show on their campuses.

"I think people in the decision making positions that aren't of this generation only saw the negative part and not the overall benefit of having us on their campus," he said.

Hill said that one of the three HBCUs in the Charlotte area - Johnson C. Smith University, Livingstone and Barber-Scotia colleges - were contacted by the show, though he wouldn't say which one.

He also wouldn't say if BET or the school decided not to participate.

David Belton, spokesman at Barber-Scotia, said before allowing a reality program to be filmed on campus, the college would have to examine the program.

Please see COLLEGE /2D

MOVIE REVIEW



'Madagascar' will leave children laughing, too

By Janell J. Lewis
THE CHARLOTTE POST

"Madagascar" is proof that good, wholesome, family animated films do still exist.

From the creators of "Shrek" and "Shark Tales," this innocent comedy stars four best friends, Marty the Zebra (Chris Rock), Alex the Lion (Ben Stiller), Gloria the Hippo (Jada Pinkett-Smith) and Melman the Giraffe (David Schwimmer) who are attractions at New York's Central Park Zoo.

The inquisitive Marty wants to explore life beyond the gates of the zoo and New York, while cocky Alex, "King of the New York City," and their two friends are content with captivity.

With the help of four cunning and lively penguins who also want to escape

confinement, Marty chases his dream of living outside the zoo and heads towards Grand Central Station. Of course Marty's best friends escape to find him once they discover he's gone.

The animals had no way of knowing that it wasn't normal to see a hippo, giraffe, zebra and certainly not a lion, roaming the streets - even if they were in NYC. Needless to say, they are soon tranquilized, captured and stuffed into crates on a ship to Africa by humans who actually are trying to help free them into the wild.

The conniving little penguins strike again, when they sabotage the ship, causing the crates to go overboard and wash onto the shore of Madagascar.

New York City may be tough, but these New York-

ers are no match for life in the wild. After seeing the white, sandy beaches, they deduce that they are in San Diego, but once they meet some jungle animal friends (from a species unknown) the zoo posse learn their true location and the scenes that follow show them trying to adapt to the other species and devise plans to get off the island and return to their homeland.

A real climax came just as Alex was beginning to transform into a true "wild lion," but it falls as quick as it rose. To a kid, that won't matter, though.

"Madagascar" readily provides amusement to both children and adults. There's the fun, carefree zebra, the timid giraffe, the easygoing lion and the bold hippo who doesn't take no

for an answer. In the end, they all affirm that New Yorkers are tough, gritty and adaptable.

Dreamworks; Animation, Comedy, Family, 80 minutes

Rated PG (mild language, crude humor and some thematic elements)

Written by Mark Burton, Billy Frolick

Produced by Karey Kirkpatrick

Directed by Eric Darnell ("Antz"), Tom McGrath ("The Ren & Stimpy Show"), Conrad Vernon

Voices of Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, Jada Pinkett-Smith, David Schwimmer ("Friends"), Sacha Baron Cohen (HBO "Da Ali G Show"), Cedric the Entertainer, Adam Del Rio, Andy Richter ("Elp"), Gwen Stefani

MOVIE REVIEW



This 'Kingdom' goes medieval on fanaticism

By Sommer Brokaw
THE CHARLOTTE POST

"Directed By Ridley Scott, "Kingdom of Heaven" is an epic adventure that takes place during the 12th century crusades.

While the plot revolves around the simple journey of a young man to become the perfect knight, the underlying message depicts the hypocrisy of religious fanaticism and the atrocity of war.

The story begins with the character Balian of Ibelin, based loosely on a real person who fought for the people of Jerusalem against the Muslim General Saladin. Unlike the real Balian, who was a lord, this fictional character is a blacksmith in France.

Perhaps, Scott's first stab at religious fanaticism is



National Treasure
Nicolas Cage, Jon Voight, Harvey Keitel, Sean Bean and Justin Bartha
Jon Turteltaub, director
Walt Disney Home Entertainment



Disney's live-action films suffered mightily until "Pirates of The Caribbean: Secret Of The Black Pearl" became a huge hit two years ago. Was this a sign the mouse company was getting its act together?

Sorta. Its films have still been spotty but interesting. "National Treasure" is such a good film. The idea is great but the execution sometimes makes you scratch your head.

The premise is fine. The film is based on a legend of the Knights Templar treasure worth billions that has been gathered from ancient civilizations. These knights eventually became the Mason organization which allegedly holds the key to this treasure.

The twist is that the Declaration of Independence has an invisible map on its back that leads to this treasure. Or at least that's what Benjamin Franklin Gates (the lukewarm Nicolas Cage) thinks. He has to steal the document to keep his greedy partner Ian (Sean Bean) from stealing the document to get the treasure. Sounds simple. Sometimes it is - a little too simple, in fact. The act of stealing the declaration is spine-tingling, but once it's stolen the document is handled with kid gloves at one moment, then tossed about as if it's a basketball.

The movie then has great peaks, but also too many valleys. Cage is engaging, but is always too cynical. Jon Voight shows up as his father but isn't used enough. Harvey Keitel is also under-used as an FBI agent who seems to know more than he's letting on. The film works better on the psychological level than action. It makes you think this could happen, but actually watching it happen makes you think otherwise.

The DVD has plenty of special features to keep the interested busy. You have to figure out some clues to get to certain features. There's a featurette on the Knights Templar, an alternate ending and a couple of puzzles to solve.

"National Treasure" is an OK movie with better-than-average features. It's worth a second look if you saw it in the theater or certainly worth seeing for the first time.

Please see KINGDOM/2D

Ratings

Classic,	★★★★★
Excellent,	★★★★
Good,	★★★
Fair,	★★
Why?	★
No stars - A mess	

