

ARTS

*Will the real Wiz
Please stand up?*

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It's funny how two productions bearing the same name are not the same at all.

Take for instance, the musical play and the movie "The Wiz." There were noticeable differences between the two, such as the setting and the characterization.

In the play we see young, sweet, innocent Dorothy from Kansas making her way down the yellow-brick road. However, the movie throws us into a New York apartment with an overly-timid 24-year-old Harlem grade school teacher who acts like a deaf-mute.

My, what a difference to comprehend.

But wait, that's not all! Although both productions are entitled "The Wiz," only the play lives up to its name. The movie should have been named "Dorothy," because it is she (Diana Ross) who plays the wizard's role. She tells all of her companions; the Tinman (Nipsy Russell), the Scarecrow (Michael Jackson) and the Lion (Ted Ross); all they need to know to gain their desired possessions and to be the persons they want.

The Wiz, Richard Pryor, is portrayed as a preposterous weakling and should not even be in the movie. The movie defeats the main purpose of "The Wiz," which is namely to show that if a mere man can evolve into a wizard, just be believing in himself, then anyone else can achieve success by following suit.

The movie is primarily a capitalization of Diana Ross. A preview article in the November 1978 issue of Ebony was entitled "Diana Ross in 'The Wiz'."

According to Ebony, upon discovering that the role of Dorothy was open, Ms.

Ross simply took it upon herself to wake up Motown Chairman Berry Gordy "with a phone call in the middle of the night" and to tell him that "she wanted to play 'Dorothy'" even though nobody had said anything to her about the part or had expressed interest in her for the part.

Ah, but there is some good in even a mediocre production. Although the movie "The Wiz" is not as brilliant, dynamic and meaningful as the play, it has a certain value. The movie has a superb score, masterfully organized by Quincy Jones. It includes hits such as "Ease On Down The Road," "Slide Some Oil To Me," "No Bad News," "He's The Wizard," "If You Believe" and "Home." The idea of adapting a classic to fit modern society deserves commendation, but in adapting, most of the classic atmosphere is lost.

The play is closely related to the original classic which makes it more indepth.

The movie is more of a superficial production that tries to have depth, but fails. Maybe the character of Dorothy should have been submissive to the character of The Wiz, whose character should have been dominant, or the movie should have been given a different name. The characters of the lion, scarecrow and tinman were portrayed effectively, as were the characters of the witches (which included Lena Horne and Mabel King).

In the play, the characters were more jovial and into their lines. And of course, the Wiz is an important figure. Both productions produce deep solemnity and joy, but the play is more moving than the movie.

If you can observe a light-hearted, superficial production and enjoy it, by all means, go see the movie.

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