

THE CHRONICLE

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Janet, not Jesse



Comedian Chris Rock says he has no interest in politics, despite urgings from the Rev. Jesse Jackson that he become more involved. "I'm in show business," Rock told TV Guide in its July 10 issue. "I wanna hang out with Janet Jackson, not Jesse Jackson." Rock also reflected on the deaths of comedians Chris Farley and Phil Hartman, with whom he worked on "Saturday Night Live," calling them victims of a comedians' curse. "We're performers - a bunch of geeks no one liked," Rock said. "Now, people finally like us, and we're willing to put up with a tremendous amount ... and make ourselves miserable to maintain it. Then, you know, we explode. Our wives shoot us, we OD or whatever."

North Carolina native hopes film will break mold for black films

By LEE HUBBARD
Special to THE CHRONICLE

SAN FRANCISCO - When Rick Famuyiwa moved from North Carolina to Inglewood, Calif., in the mid-1980s, he experienced culture shock.

He went from a conservative country atmosphere to a fast life of Jherri curls, street gangs and K-Swiss tennis shoes.

Despite this cultural shock, he was able to adjust and learn to appreciate the area as he grew up. This is apparent in his film "The Wood," which opens in theaters on Friday. The concept for the movie came up when a close friend of the filmmaker announced he was getting married.

"A couple of years ago a buddy of mine told me he was getting married, and we immediately started talking about our childhood," said Famuyiwa in an interview at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in San Francisco. "Two hours later we were still talking."

Famuyiwa knew a reflection into his childhood would make a good

film. So he sat down with his former USC film school professor, Todd Boyd, during the summer of 1997 at the Sundance Institute's screenwriters and directors labs session, and the two developed the story and the script.

While "The Wood" is the first feature film for both Famuyiwa and Boyd, it isn't the first time the two have worked together.

"Rick was in one of the first film courses that I taught at USC, and the relationship between us grew from there," said Boyd. "We would talk about everything, from film, to hoops, to rap, and over time we were throwing ideas out about film. The next thing you know we were at the Sundance Film Festival with 'Black Top Lingo.'"

"Black Top Lingo" debuted at the festival in 1995. It was a short film that dealt with complex characters who meet on a basketball court in the Los Angeles area. The film created a buzz for Famuyiwa and his storytelling ability, and helped to cement the business relationship with Boyd.

Set in the 1980s and moving to the present, "The Wood" stars Taye Diggs, Omar Epps, Richard T. Jones and Sean Jones. It focuses on the wedding of Roland (Diggs) and the surprise that Mike (Epps) and Slim (Jones) feel seeing their friend dressed in his tuxedo on the big day.

The event also surprises Roland, who walks out on his wedding a few hours before it is scheduled to be held. Mike and Slim run across town to get a drunken Roland, who is lying on his high school sweetheart's couch. They sober him up and head back to the chapel. On the way, the three relive their childhood and wonder if their bond will be broken by Roland's impending marriage.

Central to the bond between the three men is the city of Inglewood, a predominately black middle class area near Los Angeles. The city was the home - up until this year - of the Los Angeles Lakers.

It is also home to the notorious street gang the Bloods. Inglewood's street life is often portrayed in the music of rappers like Mack 10, and

See "The Wood" on C9

Original Supreme loses trademark suit

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO - An original member of the Supremes lost an appeal of her trademark suit Tuesday against three women who joined the singing group later and still perform as "Former Ladies of the Supremes."

The rights to the group's name are owned by Motown, and not by former members such as Mary Wilson, said the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The court said Motown had allowed Former Ladies of the Supremes to keep their name, and there was nothing

Wilson could do about it.

A federal judge had earlier dismissed Wilson's claims against another spinoff group, "Sounds of the Supremes," whose members include Karen Ragland, another singer from the Supremes' post-Diana Ross era who performed before the group broke up in the mid-1970s.

Lawyers for both groups said Tuesday's ruling was a byproduct of Wilson's court battles with Motown in the 1980s that ended with a settlement granting Motown exclusive rights in the Supremes' name and trademark. Her suit claimed the groups

were misleading members of the public into believing they were the authentic Supremes. The court's conclusion to the contrary wasn't surprising, said Walter Allan, lawyer for Former Ladies of the Supremes - Lynda Laurence, Scherrie Payne and Jean Terrell.

"She really didn't have a case and she shouldn't really have taken an appeal," Allan said.

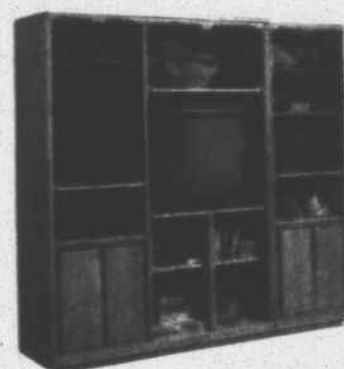
Allen Hyman, Wilson's lawyer, declined comment, saying he hadn't seen the ruling.

Wilson also contended the Former Ladies of the Supremes were responsible for recording a

See **Supremes** on page C9

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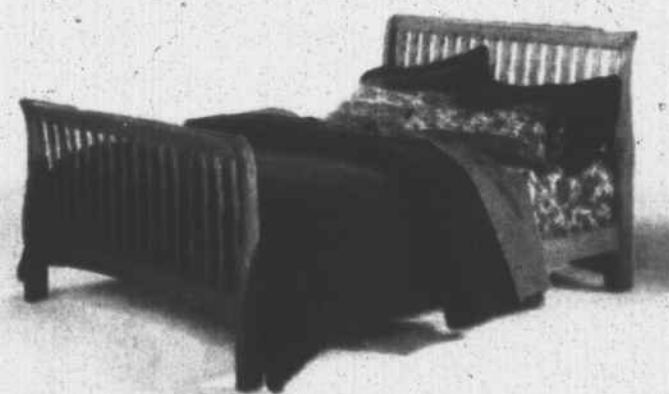
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