

"L.A. Law's" Newest Sensation Is Anything But Ordinary

By Jalyne Strong
Post Managing Editor

Stripped of his \$800 suits, \$500 shoes, gold Rolex, and spilt-shined wing tips, Blair Underwood comes across as an ordinary, albeit good-looking guy. But Blair is anything but ordinary. At 23-years-of-age he is one of the fastest rising actors in Hollywood. In the three short years since this aspiring theater student left college to seek his fortune in New York (the city of dreams), Blair has appeared in one feature film, guest starred on four T.V. series, and spent three months as an afternoon heartthrob on the soap opera, "One Life To Live."

Some say it was the role of Bobby Blue—a thug with a heart—on "Life" that catapulted Blair from obscurity to Making It in T.V.

Now his role as the slick, ambitious, Harvard-educated, entertainment lawyer, Jonathan Rollins, on the award-winning, prime time series, "L.A. Law" promises to lift him straight to the top.

1985, he arrived in New York, one of eight million people, one of about a million actors.

"The second day I arrived in New York I got a walk-on on the Cosby Show. I came to New York expecting to be looking for a waiter's job but I got a meeting with Bill Cosby.

"It all happened so fast," Blair says, "I didn't even have a resume."

After the "incredible high" of being on "Cosby," Blair says he asked himself, "What do I do now?"

"I began knocking on doors," he says.

Casting agents must have found Blair's clean-cut good looks and versatile acting abilities attractive (he was a musical, theater, voice and dance student) because "jobs" started coming in.

Blair appeared in the street beat, rap movie "Krush Groove" with Sheila E., Kurtis Blow and other popular rap groups. Then came guests spots on "Scarecrow and Mrs. King," "21 Jump Street," and "Knight Rider."



Blair Underwood

How's Blair handling this success. "Just to have a job as an actor is exciting," he says.

Modest is an appropriate adjective to describe Blair who was in Charlotte recently to lend his name to the WPCQ Christmas Miracle Telethon. Wearing a sweatshirt and corduroys, he had left all traces of Jonathan Rollins in L.A. Yet WPCQ, the local NBC affiliate, accomplished quite a coup when they got Blair to be the special guest at a banquet for the children's charity.

"After we announced that Blair was coming, we sold out in two days," revealed Sharon Crews, WPCQ-TV Public Affairs Director.

About his assisting with the fund raiser, Blair remarked, "I think it's a responsibility, if you have half a conscience. When people are interested in seeing you, you can bring that visibility to a cause."

And who wouldn't be interested in seeing Blair, a.k.a. Jonathan Rollins, alias Bobby Blue.

Hard to believe there was a time, however, when no one knew about Blair. In January



Underwood ...As Jonathan Rollins

Then, in 1986, an audition landed Blair a role on the popular soap opera "One Life To Live."

Leather-jacket clad, street kid, Bobby Blue sweeps into the life of beautiful, "good girl" Lisa's life and pretty soon she has fallen for his tough, misunderstood, sweet guy charms—all under the disapproving eyes of

her stern father, of course.

But just as things are heating up between Bobby, Lisa, Lisa's ex-boyfriend, and Lisa's father, Bobby takes off.

Women across America were asking what happened to Bobby Blue?

Blair says his contract ran out.

"I didn't renew (the contract)," he explains. "I knew pilot season was coming up and I really wanted to be on prime time-night time T.V."

Saying he was brought on "Life" to "create a love triangle," Blair explains, "I really enjoyed myself (especially being the love interest of lovely, Laura Carlington).

"I didn't expect to become popular in the role," says Blair, who left the show to escape the possibility of being typecast.

Ironically, his next role was as another "street kid." This time Blair was to be a parolee playing opposite Michael Nouri on CBS' "Downtown."

"Downtown" went down under after a short time. But it turned out to be a blessing for Blair. For "Downtown," he had moved from New York to L.A. and he was looking for work when he learned that "L.A. Law" was casting for a "young, black actor."

"It's timing," demures Blair now that he's landed the plum role of Jonathan Rollins, the first black regular on the critically acclaimed "L.A. Law." The show recently won an Emmy for being "Best Dramatic Series."

Blair has moved considerably upscale in this new role as a lawyer with the prestigious law firm of McKenzie, Brackman. But like Bobby Blue, Jonathan Rollins is brazen—in a more refined way.

"He's extremely aggressive, young and naive," describes Blair about Rollins. He talks a lot of mess and makes a lot of mistakes and thinks he can do everything on his own."

Blair is excited about an up-

coming episode on "Law" during which Rollins will get his.

"The other characters will play a trick on Rollins to knock him down a peg," smiles Blair, who further explains that the trick will be done in fun but Rollins will learn an important lesson from it.

Rollins is on the fast track with many lessons to learn and "Law" watchers are looking forward to seeing how his character develops.

On the other hand, Blair Underwood watchers are just as anxious to see how he'll handle the success that's sure to come his way.

May I be the first to say, I doubt that success will spoil Blair Underwood.

For one, he points out that "L.A. Law" producer-writer, Steve Bocho, doesn't allow "egos" on the set or the press which he feels is responsible for inflating egos. "All the actors are down to earth," says Blair.

Secondly, Blair admits his own maturity and levelheadedness is due to parental influence. He comes from a tight knit family. His parents, Frank and Marilyn and his older brother and two younger sisters live in Petersburg, Va. His parents are his managers and Blair says, "We all work together to create my career."

Blair's hopeful his career will in time include more films and he writes in his spare time with his eye on producing. "I'd like to produce films for television," he explains. "The roles aren't there for black actors; so we have to create them for ourselves."

"Many actors produce projects for themselves. And, we can't afford not to," he states matter of factly.

"Believing in yourself," according to Blair, is the key to success. On his climb to more success, this young man assures that his self confidence will not let him stumble on the trappings of ce-

lebrity. "I've spent the last two and a half years preparing for celebri-

ty," Blair laughs, "I've seen how it comes and how it goes and I've learned not to trip on it."

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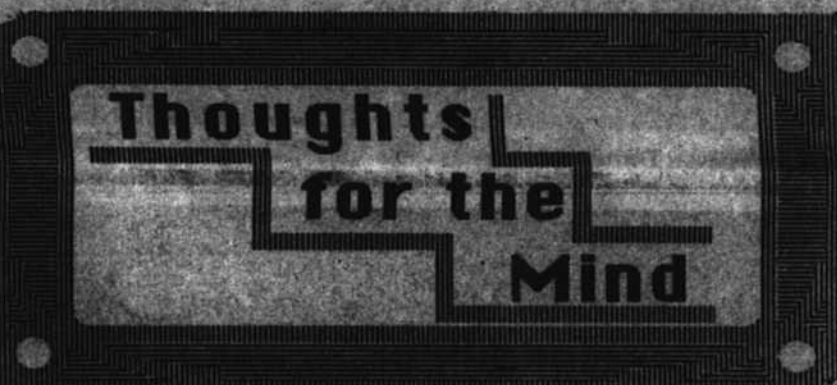
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Born of Color
-by Robert E. Martin

(Genesis 2:13) And the name of the second river is Gihon, the same is it that compasseth the whole land of E-thi-o-pi-a.

A land that has suffered for so long until now, for so long no one spoke of.

I know you are not to add on to the words of the scriptures and that surely is not my intent.

It's only to ask you people who I truly love so dear that there is a loving specialness in the color of our skin.

For we are a people who are highly spoken of.

For we are the people born of color.

I ask you to listen: (Genesis 2:8) And the Lord planted a garden eastward in Eden.

That is a garden Lord knows I'm seeking.

And may I go on: (Genesis 2:9) And there He put the man whom He formed.

Can it be that this place had climate that's always warm.

If I had one wish my wish would be indeed to be the man I truly lack, man of pure breed.

But I know that my God still loves me and I know He loves us.

For I was born a man child, born of color.

Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theatre

New York - AT&T will sponsor the December 27 NBC special "Creole Giselle," a 90-minute ballet spotlighting Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theatre of Harlem and hosted by Bill Cosby.

The performance will be telecast on NBC Sunday, December 27, (2-3:30 p.m. NYT, in stereo). (Note: Stations carrying the NFL football at 1 p.m. NYT will broadcast "Creole Giselle" from 4:30 to 8:00 p.m. NYT. Please consult your local station.)

"Creole Giselle" is a critically acclaimed production which translates the classic ballet "Giselle" from its traditional setting in 19th Century Austria to Louisiana's free Black society in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. A tragic love story, "Creole Giselle" has been hailed as the "Romeo and Juliet" of dance, and retains the ballet's original choreography, music and storyline.

The production premiered at the London Coliseum in 1984 and was the first American ballet to win the Laurence Olivier Award as Best New Dance Production of the Year. After the world premiere in London, the company performed its "Creole Giselle" at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, and in Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia.

AT&T's sponsorship of the production is part of the company's ongoing relationship with ethnic performing arts organizations. Commenting on the selection of "Creole Giselle," R.Z. Manna, AT&T Corporate Advertising Manager and Director of Corporate Underwriting and Arts Sponsorships, said, "We look for groups whose risk-taking and innovation parallel AT&T's leadership in the field of communications. The internationally recognized Dance Theatre of Harlem has developed a unique cultural art form which has mass audience appeal."

Founded by Arthur Mitchell in 1968, the award-winning Dance Theatre of Harlem will tour the Soviet Union next year, where they will visit Moscow, Tbilisi and Leningrad.

The Dec. 27 NBC special will showcase Virginia Johnson as Giselle, Eddie J. Shellman as her lover, Albert, and Lorraine Graves as Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis.

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