

Fishburne Plays Ike

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his mother got Fishburne his first agent because she realized that the only thing her son was happy doing was school plays. Her maternal nurturing immediately began to pay off, and at age 10, Laurence appeared in his first professional play, the New Federal Theatre's production of Charles Fuller's "In My Many Names and Days." His success in that play led to a recurring television role that lasted several years on the perennial daytime drama "One Life to Live." By age 12, Laurence was cast in his first feature film, director Joe Manduke's 1975 drama "Cornbread, Earl and Me."

Perhaps the turning point in his young but already prolific career came when he was only 14, with a role in Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam War epic "Apocalypse Now." That film led to Fishburne receiving roles in other Coppola films, including "Rumble Fish," "The Cotton Club" and "Gardens of Stone."

Other than his years as a student at the High School of Performing Arts in New York, Fishburne's training as an actor has been primarily "on the job." Working in high profile and critically acclaimed supporting roles

in such films as "Class Action," "King of New York," "Red Heat" and "Nightmare on Elm Street 3," among many others, was more enlightening than any master class in acting. "Apocalypse Now" was an education at the hands of some rather dynamic teachers -- Coppola, Marlon Brando and Robert Duvall, among others," Fishburne says. And it was all an apprenticeship for his star turns as Furious Styles in John Singleton's "Boyz n the Hood," his Tony Award-winning role as ex-con Sterling Johnson in last year's Broadway hit "Two Trains Running," and now as Ike Turner. The success of "Two Trains Running" at Yale Repertory in 1990, prompted renowned director Lloyd Richards to take the production to Seattle, the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego and the Doolittle in Los Angeles to fine-tune the play before opening on Broadway in April 1992. As Fishburne recalls, "The day before I was cast in 'Two Trains Running,' I was cast in a revival of Leroy Jones' play 'The Dutchman' at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. I was cast opposite Teri Garr and it was a play I've always wanted to do. But then they called to say I had won the part of Sterling Johnson." Fishburne opted for that role

instead, and began his journey toward stardom on Broadway.

"I always wanted to do a black play on Broadway, the great white way, where you say, 'No, man, I don't have to be tap dancing and singing to be up there!' That stuff's beautiful and I dig those who do it well, but it's not me. I'm a dramatic actor. I can make you cry, and make you weep, and touch you, and make you laugh, and all that through the drama, through this play, written by August Wilson, who's got these Pulitzer Prizes, this track record that rivals O'Neill, and Lloyd Richards, who broke the color line as a director back in '59." In addition to the Tony Award for best featured actor in a play, Fishburne also collected the Outer Critics Circle Award, a Drama Desk Award and a Theatre World Award for his role.

It was while Fishburne was starring on Broadway that he first read the script for "What's Love Got To Do With It," but initially turned down the offer to play Ike Turner. "In terms of the way he [Ike] was written in the first act of the script I saw the possibilities to make him really charismatic. The problem was in the second and third act -- he just became a monster. For that reason I didn't express interest."

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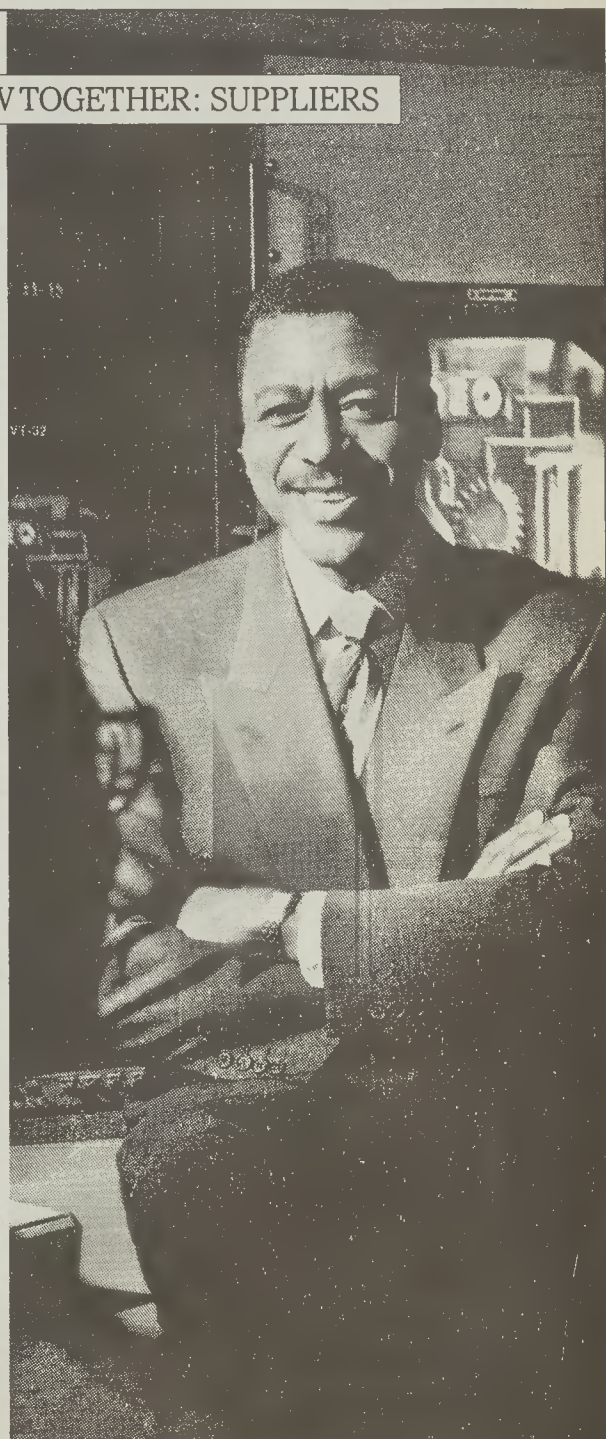
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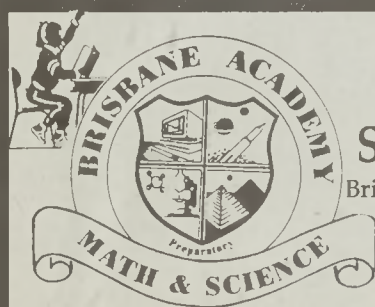


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