

What's happening to blacks on TV?



By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The casts of 'Living Single' and 'Martin'

Since the exit of NBC's "Cosby Show" television has decided to turn back the clock on how it depicts blacks.

While "Cosby" was not flawless, it at least attempted to show blacks were more than one-dimensional and did function in the middle and upper-middle class worlds. It also showed that writing and good interaction between characters could be funnier than put-downs and playing the dozens.

But those days seem to be gone. Turn on your TV set and you'll see the return of some damaging stock characters - mummies, coons, tragic mu-

lattos and a new type - coon bucks - are the latest rage. And the louder the better.

Fox network's "Martin" is certainly one of the loudest, and one of the most hurtful. The show earns the honor without the aid of car crashes and gun battles. No, the mouth is the chosen weapon. Lines are screamed at each other, even during friendly gatherings, which always take place in Martin's (comedian Martin Lawrence) apartment. None of the characters - especially the characterizations done by Lawrence - know the meaning of the words softspoken or finesse.

But there's no need for finesse on this show. Bad writing is the culprit. Actors don't need a sense of comic

timing because they don't have anything funny to say. That's why necks work (done flawlessly by Lawrence's Shenene character), fingers point, shoes get thrown to the floor in preparation for a fight and eyes bulge: make it look funny, even if it doesn't sound funny.

"Martin" runs rampant with the coon stereotype, only with a '90s twist. The Martin character pops his eyes, let's out high-pitched "whazups" (similar to the way Jimmie Walker used to yell "dy-no-mite" in the '70s) and cuts the pure fool. But he's '90s chic because he takes no mess from the man and he's sexually active. That makes the brother cool. It doesn't matter he's a chauvinist or treats his woman

Gina (Tisha Campbell - a tragic mulatto if there ever was one) like a possession instead of a person. The brother gets the best of both stereotypes - the humor of the coon and the swagger of the buck. The brother's got it going on.

But "Martin" is not the only culprit on Fox. "In Living Color" leaves no stone unturned. True, the show is a satire and teases everybody from Michael Jackson to the Pope, but it can do so in some very unfunny ways. A recent skit on Jackson's alleged sexual molestation of a 13-year-old boy went way past poking fun and landed on the far side of tasteless. But the show has never been much on taste anyway. The Fire

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In Review: Dance troupe wows Winthrop



Dumakude

By Sandra Hawley
SPECIAL TO THE POST

ROCK HILL - Thokoza, a 30-year-old South African singing group opened the Museum of York County's eighth annual Africa Alive! celebration with a performance that entertained and enlightened the audience at Winthrop University's Tillman Auditorium.

Adorned in a combination of vibrant traditional garments and American dress, the five women vocalized the joy, pain and reality of South Africa with an intensity that crossed cultural lines. In the choral style of countrymen Ladysmith Black Mombazo, Thokoza wept, crooned and shouted through freedom chants, prayer hymns, lullabies and wedding songs.

While the lilting voices of the women were woven together in haunting melodies, 9 year old Mandla Msomi, son of group leader, Thuli Dumakude, provided the binding thread of the performance as the solo percussionist. His talent was showcased in several fervent songs of celebration and freedom.

In addition to mellifluous a capella tones, Thokoza offered up thick slices of South African culture and history through energetic dances and compelling theatrics. In less than two hours the six performers talked, sang and educated the audience about the coming of the first European settlers to South Africa, the spirituality of Zulu women, the amusing traditions of weddings, the necessity of strong community ties and the leadership of Nelson Mandela.

Applause rose from the audience as the singers spoke passionately about the dismantling of apartheid next year.

"We want you all to save your pennies now and come celebrate the end of apartheid with us next year," Thokoza leader, Thuli Dumakude beamed, "because you and your prayers have been with us through it all."

Without dwelling on the pain of apartheid, the group launched into an animated freedom song and Dumakude encouraged the audience to respond in South African fashion with a rousing "Yabo!" (Translation-Yes, That's Alright). The singers made it obvious that their mission is one of celebration and hope.

Diverse and memorable, Thokoza's performance brought the audience as close to reality in the townships and bantu stands of South Africa as possible. Although the word "thokoza" means happiness in Zulu, there is no doubt that these performers have expanded the meaning to encompass a richness and an abundance of spirit and life that defies definition.

Adorned in traditional dress, Thokoza's tributes to the ancestors, the people and leaders of South Africa through song, dance and drama created a compelling performance and an ideal kick off for The Museum of York County's Africa Alive! celebration.

Sounds By Winfred B. Cross

Soul Mission

Various Artists
Produced and Written by Darrell Brown and David Batteau
Word/Epic

☆☆☆ 3/4

Very few black musical art forms would exist if it were not for gospel music. Soul, r&b, hip-hop, jazz, blues - you name it, and gospel has had an influence over it. And there is no musical genre as passionate or powerful.

So having secular artists do gospel is no real big deal. Heck, that's where most secular artists come from - the church. Aretha, Patti, Dionne - they all owe their careers to gospel. Even hard core hip-hoppers Jodeci started in the church.

Thankfully, there's a good number of secular artists which have not forgotten where their roots are. Writers and producers David Bateau and Darrell Brown have assembled an eclectic group of songs, singers and musicians for what may become the best pop/gospel event of the year.

What Brown and Bateau wanted was a sound that combined the fun of r&b and the inspiration and joy of gospel. They have done so with aplomb. This record brims with soul and spirit. The singing goes beyond this world

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SOUL MISSION

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