

# 9A ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## 'Bible Stories' sends a powerful message

By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Donald Lawrence has never really liked to do things the easy way, or does he go for the conventional.

That's why his March 24 production of "Bible Stories" shouldn't have surprised anyone. The difference between it and most other gospel plays is like night and day.

Not one was there a mother lamenting over a child's drug addiction, life of prostitution or plain infidel ways. Nope, not one.

Instead, there was first-rate production, continuity and stunnin' singing, especially by the phenomenal Daryl Coley. It was a production worthy of Broadway. It's a roaring good time with a powerful message.

"I really want to do refined

theatre," Lawrence said. "I just don't want to do things to get a laugh. There's so much room to use your imagination."

Lawrence's two-act play shows he has a vivid imagination. It has elements of everything - drama, modern dance, old-school gospel, black Greek stepping - the works. Yet it worked because its central theme is simply telling Bible stories - from the creation in Genesis to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection - through different mediums.

"I like to be versatile," Lawrence said. "I like to give people all that I can. There's so much to pull from in black culture. The show is an emotional roller coaster ride. When you leave you are tired, but you say 'oooh, that was good.'"

That's the reaction most had, but not so much for the pro-



duction as for the music. Lawrence is a wonderful writer and singer. His tunes are based in rich melodies and insightful lyrics. Most of the songs are his own creation, coming from his Tri-City Singers' "Bible Stories" and "A Song Writers Point of View" CDs.

"Actually, I'd plan to do the play first, but I got the opportunity to do the choir's album first," he said. "Some of it I knew I was going to use, but when I got real close to the finished product, I added some things from the first album. I also built some things around two songs from Daryl's new album 'Beyond The Veil' and 'Standing On The Promises.'"

Coley and Lawrence have been friends for years. Both had thought about doing a project together, but neither seem to have the time. "But when I wrote 'When Sunday Comes,' I knew I wanted Daryl to sing it."

Sing it, he did. Coley's heroic tenor (probably closer to soprano) brought some of the audience to its feet. Others sat awe-struck while others

waived their hands, yelling hallelujahs. "When Sunday Comes" deals with the resurrection. Coley sang it as if he saw it personally. His roots are firmly grounded in gospel, but his voice has elements of jazz, r&b and soul.

"Daryl is like one of my favorite singers," Lawrence said. "I'm a really big fan. He's an incredible singer, very professional and always knows (what to do). He's definitely a pro."

There were other brilliant moments. Coley and Lawrence combine on the powerful, but bombastic "He Holds The Keys," which was staged beautifully. "Calvary" features Lajuene Thompson, Lynn Neal and Arnetta Murrill-Crooms on vocals and choreographer Walter Rutledge as Jesus. Moving doesn't describe it best, but that's what it was.

"I basically had the concept of what I wanted to do so it was easy for Tony to work with me because he didn't have to start from scratch," Lawrence said. "We were basically on the

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## Cover 2 Cover

Ain't Gonna Be The Same Fool Twice  
April Sinclair  
Hyperion  
\$19.95

By Jeri Young  
THE CHARLOTTE POST



April Sinclair's "Coffee Will Make You Black" was lauded as an incredible first work. Winner of the 1994 Book of the Year Award, and the Carl Sandburg Award in Fiction, "Coffee" was an innovative work that detailed the life of Stevie, a young black Chicago native searching for identity, both ethnically and sexually. Uproariously funny, "Coffee" garnered Sinclair the prestigious New Author Award by the Go on Girl! Book Club.

Sinclair's second effort falls victim to the sophomore jinx. Lacking energy and edge, "Ain't Gonna Be The Same Fool Twice" picks up where "Coffee" left off. Young Stevie, the heroine of "Coffee," graduates from high school and begins her own self-exploration. Stevie's quest for a sexual identity remains the core of the novel.

"Ain't Gonna Be The Same Fool Twice" opens with Stevie entering college at a predominately white midwestern university. Sinclair does a fair job of presenting college life in the early '70s - from bell bottoms to disco. More effort, however, should have been placed on the exploration of the relationships that Stevie develops as well as character development. Too many of Sinclair's characters are flat, lacking personality and substance.

True to her style, Sinclair attempts to use the vernacular and humor to propel Stevie from one adventure to another. Following graduation, Stevie takes a trip with several college friends to San Francisco, where to the horror of her parents, she decides to remain. She is befriended by Traci, who offers her a place to stay, affection and all the soy burgers she can eat. Traci and Stevie eventually become intimate, and Stevie confronts her own sexuality and other issues head on.

Sinclair does her best work in the San Francisco setting. The majority of the characters, from Traci to the flamboyant "Disco Queen" Sterling, although stereotypical, are better developed and more interesting than the characters in "Coffee."

It is difficult to follow up on a success of the magnitude

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PHOTOS: REG MCMURRY-REMARK



# SOUNDS

By Winfred B. Cross

Lionel Richie  
Louder Than Words  
Lionel Richie, David Foster, James Anthony Charmichael, James K. Harris III and Terry Lewis, producers  
Mercury Records

☆☆☆☆

Lionel Richie's career

## Richie turns pain in riveting work on new CD

has been in a holding pattern for a number of years due to personal tragedy. Divorce, the death of his father and a friend dying from AIDS silenced his once-prolific pen.

He hasn't been heard from since his greatest hit package from Motown (which he left in late '92).

Richie used his life's anguish to better his storytelling skills. He's searched deep within himself to come up with the most consistent work of his career.

"Louder Than Words," latest, will be released April 16.

"I've lived through an incredible period of growth," Richie said recently. "A period of pain and introspection and change,

a period different than anything I've ever encountered, but ultimately a wonderful period of creative expression. I'm thankful for the struggle."

"All these events were devastating," he said. "I had no choice but to take the time to deal with the emotions. Loss was something new for me. I couldn't shrug it off or whistle it away. I had to look loss in the face and ask myself 'Can I survive these blows? Am I strong enough? I'm glad to say I am. And I'm thrilled to be able to put these feelings of loss and gain - all my human feelings - into this record.'"

I know, I know, I have the same problems with Richie - too much formula and not enough soul. But that's probably too harsh a criticism. Richie did good 'ole r&b with the Commodores for a number of years. Heck, they were the best r&b band in the land for a while. When he learned how to write - and I mean really learned how to write - he branched out in different directions. In short, he became a writer. The color (if music has such) didn't matter. The tune was the thing.

And if you examine Richie's work closely and leave out the sell-out argument, you have to give him props. He's written some great tunes. "All Night Long" is as easy to listen to today as it was in the '80s. The

same goes for "Hello" and even the Barry Manilow-ish "Truly." Richie is a tunesmith.

His melodies linger whether you want them to or not.

Richie is again expanding. He includes his easy to recognize ballads, but he's gone closer to his roots. You hear a lot of early Commodores in the work. Give thanks to Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis for that. The funksters helped craft Richie's first single "Don't Wanna Lose You," which could easily be called "Just To Be Close To You, Part II." It's old-school in construction, delivery - the whole nine yards. How serious is

Richie about peddling this as old-school? Check out the video, filmed on the set of Soul Train, complete with an afroed Don Cornelius introducing Richie.

The funk duo strike again on "I Wanna Take You Down," a bob-your-head mid-tempo jam that will pick up plenty of urban airplay. So will "Say I Do," a tasty ballad that showcases Lewis and Jam as producers and Richie as an artist.

There are plenty of other standout performances. "Nothing Else Matters" is classic solo Richie - haunting melody, mushy lyrics, butter-smooth delivery. "Ordinary Girl" is in the same vein, but it further showcases the expressiveness of Richie's voice. He's not a great singer, he says, "but I do think I'm a credible story-teller." He is.

The only real misstep is the bombastic "Climbing." It's too big, too loud, too "Say You, Say Me" (Oscar or not, that is not a great song).

That's not enough to keep this from being a multi-format smash, however. The question is whether Richie's vast audience has forgotten him. I think not.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆ Classic;  
☆☆☆☆ Excellent;  
☆☆☆ Good; ☆☆ Fair;  
☆ Why?;  
No Stars Given - Please, Spare Us.

