

LISA COLLINS
Behind
The
Scenes



Hot property: While the vast majority of black actresses have difficulty finding work, Vanessa Williams seems to be having her way - on the Broadway stage, on the record charts, and now in good measure on the silver screen.



WILLIAMS

Williams, who stars opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger and James Caan in "Eraser," set to open next week, has landed another plum role. That of the female lead in "Gangster," opposite Laurence Fishburne, who is also listed as one of the film's producers. To be directed by Dill Duke, the movie is the story of a Harlem racketeer, who while growing in power, wages war against legendary mobster Dutch Schultz. Williams plays Francine Hughes, the Harlem nurse who falls in love with him. Shooting is slated to begin later this month.

In other casting news, Dennis Haysbert (Whitney Houston's love interest in "Waiting To Exhale") has been set to co-star in "Absolute Power," which is being directed by Clint Eastwood. Haysbert will play a secret service agent in the story of a thief (Eastwood) who, during the course of the heist, becomes an eye witness to murder and subsequently entangled in a high level government scandal.

Firing back: Anita Baker has fired off another volley in the battle to restructure and get a hold on her business affairs by filing a breach of contract complaint against her

lawyer, former manager and publisher. The action filed last month claims fraud, deceit, breach of fiduciary duty, breach of contract, FISHBURNE



defamation of character, intentional infliction of emotional distress, civil conspiracy, and attorney malpractice. It stems from a default judgement which was filed by Sherwin Bash, Baker's former manager, against Baker in February for \$6 million in damages, back royalties, unpaid commissions, other revenue and court costs. Baker's suit seeks a full accounting of all monies collected by Bash in her behalf. The singer is reportedly frustrated that she was not properly represented nor informed of critical business matters. Just last year, she was seeking to get out of her contract at Elektra, but has since come to terms with her label.

Round Two: The battle against record companies is heating up again. C. Delores Tucker, founder of the National Political Congress of Black Women, joined former education secretary William Bennett, Sen. Joseph Lieberman and Sen. Sam Nunn to announce a radio campaign targeting five of the major record labels alleging that when big companies hawk songs with degrading lyrics, music is leading society down the wrong road.

By the way: Spike Lee will reportedly direct "Reliable Sources," the last film from controversial screenwriter Joe Eszterhaus. Production on the



movie, about a young reporter who gets much too personally involved in a story, is set to get underway sometime this



GOLDBERG

fall...Whoopi Goldberg has

nabbed the movie option to "Lily White," centering around the escapades of a Jewish lawyer from Long Island...Columbia/ Tri-Star has apparently decided that talk shows and former "Cosby" kid Tempestt Bledsoe don't mix after all. Word is they're cancelling her low-rated talker "Tempest"...And who could get Berry Gordy back into the studio? None other than old friend and creative partner Smokey Robinson. The duo have written and are in the process of recording some material together. They're also putting a new twist on some of their own golden oldies.

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