

1B ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

African American sit-coms back in style

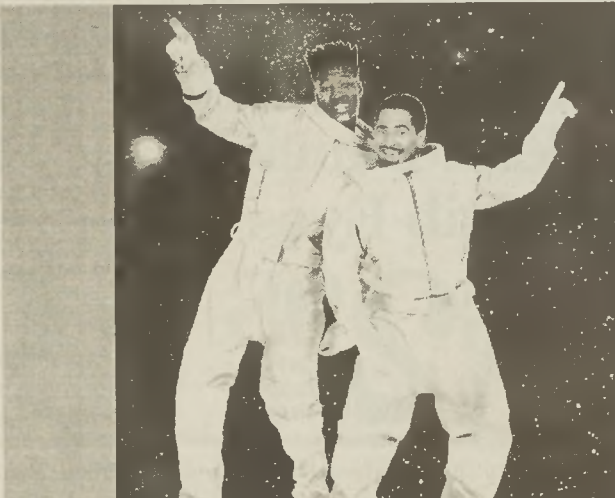
By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

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Looked at your television lately. African Americans are everywhere unless you tune in to NBC.

That's right. The network that brought you the '80s smashes "A Different World" and the "Cosby Show" is now known as "No Black Contracts." Not one African American show is featured on NBC. No, not one. Heck, you'll be hard pressed to find black people anywhere on NBC.

The network doesn't seem to be hurting, however. With Shows like "Seinfeld" "Mad About You" and "Friends," it doesn't matter what black



Homeboys in Outer Space

shows did for them in the past. It's "what have you done for me lately?"

Several black-themed shows are returning. Fox still has the funny "Living Single" and the no-longer funny "Martin." I guess you can call "New York Undercover" a black show since most of the criminals are black, unless it's a racial issue then it's a piece of po' white trash. "Family Matters" is still hanging at ABC, but not Mr. Cooper. WB still has "Wayans Brothers," the sassy "Moesha" and the sweet "The Parent Hood" and "Sister Sister."

There are a handful of new black-themed shows. Have I mentioned none of them are on NBC? Nope, not one.

An NBC alumnus is doing wonders for CBS. Bill Cosby and Phylicia Rashad team up for "Cosby." Bill's ditched his high-dollar digs, medical prac-

tice and children for a more urbane, middle-class setting. He's been forced to retire and he's driving his wife crazy. It's actually based on a British comedy. It's not the "Cosby

Show," but nothing ever will be. It was good enough to be the highest debuting show at 8 p.m. Mondays in the last 10 years. He's also helped CBS to leap frog over ABC for second place.

Speaking of frogs, Michigan J and the WB network has its share of black-based shows. The newest is Steve Harvey's self-titled show (8 p.m. Sundays). Harvey's roped into becoming a school teacher at a high school full of misfits. You know the school has problems when Cedric the Entertainer is the gym instructor. His class is filled with cut-ups who have problems with self-esteem, motivation and choosing the correct weave length. The pilot's best moment? Havey has to get between two warring women and says "look, this ain't Ricki Lake. I'll let you fight."



Malcolm & Eddie

Giving Harvey stiff competition for best new black comedy is the UPN's "Malcolm & Eddie." The show stars another "Cosby Show" alumnus, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, and comedian Eddie Griffin. It's sort of an "Odd Couple" premise: Warner's buttoned down and serious about becoming a sports caster while Griffin is, well, reckless and

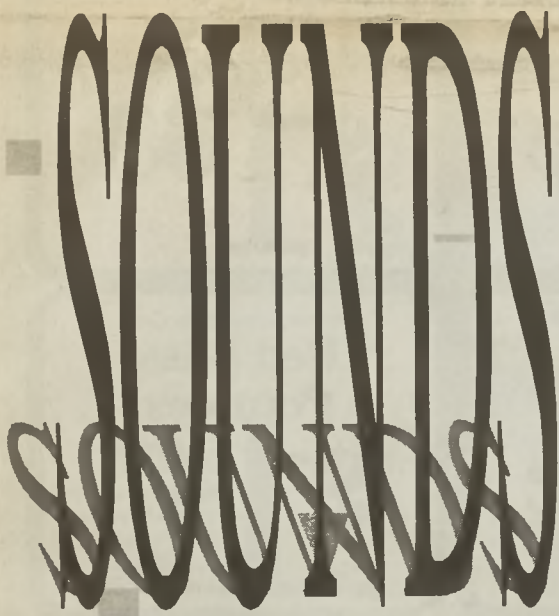
clueless. It's funny stuff, especially when Griffin flies off into one of his homemade dance routines. His attempt to put lyrics to Quincy Jones' "Sanford & Son" theme was hilarious. Warner is the perfect straight man to Griffins no-harm-meant-buffoonery.

More troubling is UPN's "Sparks" (9:30 p.m. Mondays). See HOMEBOYS on page 2B



Moesha

Mayfield's pen, voice still have passion



By Winfred B. Cross

Sammie Wallace
God Will Get You
Through It
Sammie Wallace, producer
Special Ideal
Records/Pure Records



Sammie Wallace

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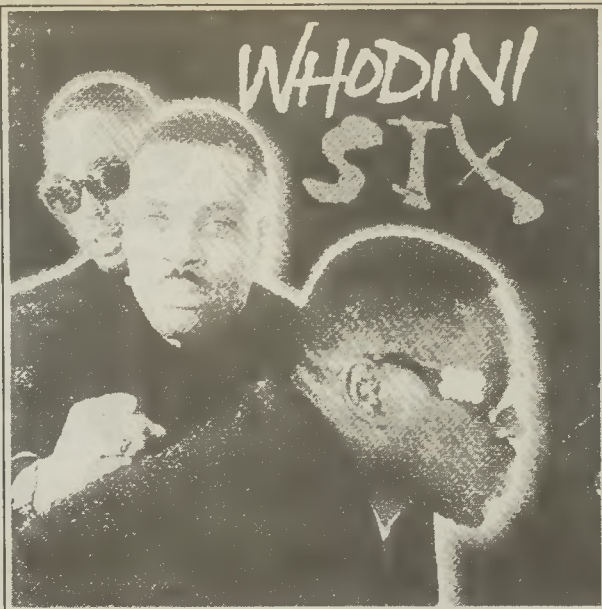
Sammie Wallace was a local promoter for a number of years. Now he's trying his hand at being a gospel singer. It's not a bad choice for Wallace. He has an expressive and explosive tenor that's well-suited for the dynamics of singing gospel.

I might question his choice of material, however. Not that it's not good. Far from it. "God Will Get You Through It" is a nice piece of work. But you will find it familiar. It's a reworking of the Solo hit "Where Do You Want Me To Put It." I'm not crazy about turning overtly secular songs into gospel songs. He has done a masterful job of changing the words.

The more representative song is the 'B' side of this single "Praise Him Tonight." It has an r&b-based beat, but it's original.

Curtis Mayfield
New World Order
Curtis Mayfield, executive producer
Warner Bros. Records

☆☆☆☆



Whodini

I've been a fan of Curtis Mayfield since I heard the Impressions sing "Your Precious Love" way back in the '60s. That was just one of many songs that spoke volumes about Mayfield as a writer and a singer. His thin, airy tenor was a thing of beauty. His writing? Few, if any, equaled him.

Mayfield's been quiet lately. He was involved in a freak accident in 1990 which left him a quadriplegic. His recovery has slowed his appearances.

But not his writing skills. Mayfield has been writing with the aid of a computer. The fruits of his writing can be found in his latest CD New World Order. It's a sparkling collection of his vivid writing style and '90s cutting-edge production.

Two of the 13 songs are remakes of his own classics - "We People Who Are Darker Than Blue" and "The Girl I Find Stays On My Mind." Mayfield doesn't stray too far from the original renderings. There's no need. The lyrics are timeless.

The new songs will fit into his burgeoning song book as if they were written in his heyday. Mayfield is still writing about relevant subjects: man's inhumanity to man, equality, justice, peace and self-worth. And, of course, he writes as nice a love song as anyone.

The title song is classic Mayfield. He juxtaposes lyrics of despair and strife (Another victim born out here in the hood/And based on statistics it really ain't all good/Welfare takes the tab and daddy can't sign/And can't be seen, the family becomes a crime) with a chorus of hope (A new world order, a brand new day/A change of mind for the human race). It's the same stuff rappers talk about, except they would use a sting of unnecessary obscenities to be descriptive.

There's plenty of other good stuff. Mavis Staples makes a guest appearance on "Ms. Martha," a funky, funky number produced by Organized Noise. Think of it as TLC's "Waterfalls" meets Mayfield's "Freddie's Dead." The production crew clears out of Mayfield's way, letting his



Curtis Mayfield

voice and subtle style shine through. Aretha Franklin lends her soulful pipes on "Back To Living Again," a never-give-up anthem. Who better than Mayfield to sing such a song? None.

Mayfield is unable to stand, so his delivery is a little labored and weak. Otherwise he's in fine voice and great spirits.

Those interested in songwriting should take a listen to this record and Mayfield's other stuff as well. His true fans

should be glad to add this to their collection. Welcome back, Curtis.

Whodini
Six
Jermaine Dupri,
executive producer
So So Def
Records/Columbia
Records

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See SOUNDS Page 2B