

# 5B ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Badu looks to be big in coming year



By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

*Erykah Badu  
On & On (single)  
Erykah Badu and JaBonne  
Jamal, producers  
Kedar Entertainment*

☆☆☆

In this age of sound alike singers, Erykah Badu could be looked upon as a breath of fresh air. She isn't attempting to sound like Mary J. Blige or Faith Evans. She doesn't have the pipes to attempt Whitney Houston or Mariah Carey, for that matter. What Badu possesses is a voice that doesn't sound like anyone else's. You could make the case she's faintly reminiscent of Billie Holiday. OK, OK, that's a stretch, but she isn't afraid to take chances.

I cautiously say she could be fresh because I'm not crazy about the single "On & On." I will say it's different. Badu takes jazz-spiced vocals and laces them with a mellow hip hop jeeb beat that's easy on the ear. But upon closer inspection, it is not quite as deep as it appears to be. The lyrics hinge on being silly, but they are just the thing the current generation is looking for.

The single is already getting tremendous amounts of air play. Included are snippets from her forthcoming CD *Baduizm*. None of the songs are particularly memorable, except a wretched remake of an obscure Atlantic Starr song "Touch A Four Leaf Clover." Not to worry. The single will give this woman a mega hit. Marketing is power.

*Deniece Williams  
Love Solves It All  
Deniece Williams, Alan  
Glass and Andrew Klippel,  
producers  
Upstage Records*

☆☆☆

Deniece Williams has always been able to gravitate between the secular and gospel genres. She hasn't recorded either in years. She's broken her association with Columbia Records and has hooked up with Upstage Records, a British company.

The result is *Love Solves It All*, a collection of spirited songs that show Williams still has a lot of voice left. She uses all of it on "One More Kiss," which finds her gliding effortlessly skyward toward those big notes she used to hit on songs like "Silly" and "Let's Here It For The Boy."

There are other songs, such as "Why You Wanna Do Me?" and "Fallen Angel," but none of them have the spark as Williams' other hits. Thankfully, the last three songs are spiritually-based and have some of the fervor of her gospel recordings. The last song, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," shows she has at least one gospel recording left in her.

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## Hit play to have say at Belk theatre Sunday

By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

N.C. natives Sadie and Bessie Delany didn't think much of the idea of talking to a New York Times reporter about their lives. They didn't think they had much to say.

Were they wrong or what? The sisters gained nationwide notoriety from the article, which led to a best-selling book, which led to a hit-Broadway play that's leading to a soon-to-be-released movie.

The play, aptly titled "Having Our Say," has left Broadway and makes a stop in Charlotte Sunday for two performances at 2 and 7 p.m. at the N.C. Blumenthal Performing Arts Center's Belk Theatre.

The play centers on the life of the country's most famous centenarians. The sisters were the third and fourth children of 10 born to a former slave. Their father was eventually elected the first black bishop in the Episcopal Church and was a teacher at St. Augustine's College in Raleigh. Their mother worked at the college as an administrator.

The sisters were raised in a middle class home that didn't have lots of money, but their household placed a premium on education. Bessie (who died in September 1995 at 104 years old) graduated from the Columbia Dental School and was one of two black women to be an accredited dentist in New York. Sadie received a master's degree from



Micki Grant and Lizan Mitchell from "Having Our Say"

Columbia University in New York and was the first black home economics teacher in New York high schools.

A quick glance at their lives would make one believe the sisters were privileged. Maybe. But they experienced every facet of American life from the 1890s to the 1990s. They dealt with racism, Jim Crow, the Great Depression and whatever else life had to throw at them.

Micki Grant will portray Sadie. Grant is a four-time Tony nominee and a recipient of an Obie, an NAACP Image Award and a Drama Desk

Award. Grant wrote and starred in "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope." She also portrayed attorney Peggy Nolan on NBC's "Another World."

Bessie will be portrayed by Lizan Mitchell. Her acting credentials are extensive as well. She's done "Fences," "Amen Corner," "Medea" and "So Long On Lonely Street." She has been nominated for Best Actress by the Outer Critics' Drama Circle for her role in "So Long."

Mitchell, a Greensboro native, says people will be surprised by the play.

"They think it's gonna be two

little old ladies talking pleasantly in the living room," Mitchell said. "But this play is life for the past 100 years."

Emily Mann directs the play. She was nominated for Best Play and Outstanding Director of a Play by the Tony Awards and Drama Desk Awards for "Having Our Say." She wrote the script from Amy Hill Hearth's book "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years," which has sold more than 1.5 million copies in hard copy and paperback. She praised the work as something that transcends race.

"It's not only a portrait of women overcoming barriers with souls and hearts in tact, but one of the greatest marriages any of us will ever see," Mann said. "Doing for others,

education, God and family — those four pillars gave them the springboard to set extraordinary standards."

The play opened on Broadway April 6, 1995 and ran for 8 1/2 months, giving 302 performances. It garnered tremendous critical praise, receiving nominations from the Outer Critics Circle Awards, Drama Desk Awards, and Tony Awards.

Tickets for the "Having Our Say" range from \$12 — \$34 and are available at the Blumenthal's box office by calling (704) 372-1000. Tickets may also be purchased at any TicketMaster location or can be charged by calling (704) 552-6500.



## Babyface earns 12 nods in latest Grammy race

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Producer, songwriter and recording artist Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds was nominated for 12 Grammy Awards Monday, tying a record set 14 years ago by Michael Jackson.

Smashing Pumpkins received seven nominations, including album of the year for "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness," while Tracy Chapman and Vince Gill were each nominated for five awards.

The televised Grammy Award ceremony will be held in New York's Madison Square Garden on Feb. 26.

Babyface, as he is known, had a role in two of the nominees for song of the year, a songwriting award. He was nominated for writing "Exhale (Shoop Shoop),"

sung by Whitney Houston. He produced Eric Clapton's "Change the World," for which songwriters Gordon Kennedy, Wayne Kirkpatrick and Tommy Sims were nominated.

Clapton's "Change the World" was also nominated for record of the year, along with Chapman's comeback hit, "Give Me One Reason," Canadian chanteuse Celine Dion's "Because You Loved Me," Alanis Morissette's "Ironic" and Smashing Pumpkins' "1979."

Other nominees for album of the year include the "Waiting to Exhale" soundtrack, Dion's "Falling Into You," Beck's "Odelay" and "The Score" by the Fugees.

In addition to the two Babyface-related songs, nominees for song of the year were "Because You Loved Me," LeAnn Rimes' "Blue" and

"Give Me One Reason."

Nominees for best new artist were country singer Rimes, the Tony Rich Project, Jewel, Garbage and current chart-toppers No Doubt.

Babyface's record ties Jackson's high-water mark in the Grammys. Jackson was nominated for 12 and won eight awards in 1983, the year his best-selling "Thriller" dominated the music world.

Although he's a hit-making recording artist in his own right, Babyface is better known for his behind-the-scenes work that drew such stars as Houston and Clapton to him. He's been nominated for 23 Grammy Awards since 1988, and has won six.

Clapton, Dion, producer David Foster, newcomer The Tony Rich Project and Pierre Boulez were each nominated for four Grammy Awards.

Ballots will be sent next week to the 9,000 voting members of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, who determine the award winners. Nominees for 89 categories were announced Monday.

The Beatles were nominated for best pop performance by a duo or group for "Free As a Bird," one of the songs resurrected from old John Lennon tapes with later vocals and instruments added by the surviving Beatles. They will compete with the Gin Blossoms, Journey, the Neville Brothers, Take 6 and the Presidents of the United States of America.

Dion, Jewel, Shawn Colvin, Toni Braxton and Gloria Estefan were nominated for best female pop vocal performance. Clapton, Sting, the Tony Rich Project, John Mellencamp and Bryan Adams were nominated for best male pop vocal performance.

The category best pop collaboration with vocals will feature some strange pairings: Frank Sinatra and Luciano Pavarotti; Natalie Cole with her late father, Nat "King"

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## The Artist to play Charlotte

By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

His name was Prince and he was funky.

Now he's 'The Artist' and he's still funky, but also more mellow and charitable. So charitable that he's on a 15-city tour (which started Tuesday in Philadelphia) dubbed "Love 4 One Another Charities Tour" that will donate all the money to charity.

The concert, stop 11 on the tour, is 8 p.m. Jan. 17 at the Charlotte Hornets Training Center in Fort Mill, S.C. Tickets are \$35 and will go on sale early next week through TicketMaster outlets.

"He doesn't get a dime for the tour," said J. Howell of C&J Concert Promotions, which has



a hand in the concert. "He's not doing anything for the money. He's putting up a lot of his own money. He really wants to do things for kids. He's settled, happier and on a mission."

The Artist's mission so far is a success. Demand for tickets has been incredible. "They've been beating down the doors," Howell said. One venue sold out in five minutes. The Atlanta event sold out in three. To try to avoid scalpers, Howell said tickets will go on sale early next week, not Friday as was previously advertised.

All venues range in size from 2,500 to 5,000 seats — small for a performer of The Artist's stature. But that's exactly what he wants.

"He wants to do small clubs because he wants to be close to his people," Howell said. "The environment is like in the '60s. It's not a concert, it's an event. He doesn't want it to be labeled as a concert. He just wants to enjoy themselves and be happy."

Happy wasn't a word usually associated with The Artist. Always referred to as a brilliant song writer and performer, he was reclusive, avoiding the press. Since his marriage to Mayte, a dancer from his band, birth of a child, and freedom from his contract with Warner Bros, The Artist seems more open, more accessible.

"His motto is 'Freedom is A Beautiful Thang.' He waited to do this tour until he was free from his record deal," Howell said. "He doesn't believe in being locked down. He has total control of everything that's being done. There are no promoters. Everything is done in-house. Anyone connected to the show itself is part of the family."

Doors to the event will open at noon. The Artist's paraphernalia will be on sale and a web site will be available.

"You will learn a lot about The Artist," Howell said. "You'll find out he's down to earth and he cares about people."

Howell said he's been a part of the family for a year. He met The Artist while doing promotions with George Clinton. Howell has been in productions for about 10 years.

C&J promotions is about a year-and-a-half old. Crowe said the charities that will benefit from the event have yet to be selected.

"That's up to him," Crowe said. "We've got about five charities who've made requests but he has the final say so."