

Theater to show films on blacks

By Mary Boyle
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE - Bored with the club scene and tired of having to venture into the suburbs to see a movie, Michael Johnson and his friends decided to bring the entertainment closer to home.

They opened an independent theater Friday in an old movie house that's been vacant for 15 years.

But Johnson and his 30-something pals are doing more than trying to bring movies back to urban neighborhoods, where theaters have all but vanished: Their Heritage Playhouse Cinema will showcase movies by and about blacks.

Johnson believes it will be the only movie house in the nation to regularly feature classic black movies, such as Friday's opening feature, "Raisin in the Sun" with Sidney Poitier, "Imitation of Life" and "The Stranger."

"Baltimore has a rich tradition of movies and bringing something like this back is kind of nostalgic," said Johnson, who was an advertising executive until he joined six partners in the movie theater business.

They spent evenings cleaning up the theater's 350 comfortable, red upholstered seats, 18-by-50-foot screen and heavy brown drapes.

After years of exile in suburban malls and multiplexes, first-run movies are also slowly returning to urban neighborhoods.

Former basketball star Magic Johnson has joined with Sony Theaters to open multiplexes in black communities nationwide. So far, two theaters have opened in Los Angeles and Atlanta, and 13



more are scheduled by 1998 in cities such as New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Baltimore and Chicago.

Harlem USA, a retail and entertainment complex that will include movie theaters, is also set to open in 1998 in New York.

"It appears Sony has gotten the message," said Joseph Madison, an NAACP board member who heads the civil rights group's annual black entertainment awards. "Maybe due to their leadership, others will follow."

Market research shows blacks go to the movies more

than whites. Fifty-two percent of all blacks go to the movies at least once a month, compared with 31 percent of whites and other minorities, according to Market Segment Research and Consulting, a research firm specializing in minority consumers.

Blacks in 1995 accounted for 18 percent to 20 percent of all ticket sales, or \$510 million, said Ken Smikle, president of Target Market News, a Chicago market research firm specializing in black consumers.

But some are skeptical that any significant change is occurring.

"The average black entrepreneur is not getting that same kind of treatment Magic Johnson is from Sony," said Frank Mercado-Valdez, president of the African Heritage Network, a New York distributor of black movies.

"There clearly is a market, but theater chains are not saying 'Let's go back to the black communities,'" said Robert Johnson, head of Black Entertainment Television, which is launching a cable channel devoted to movies by and about blacks.

Black movie and television viewers "don't see enough films that reflect the diversity of black life. That's really what we need to see."

Michael Johnson said he wants to feature films at the Baltimore movie house with black directors, actors and actresses in powerful roles, regardless of whether they appear with a mostly white cast. Among the movies planned are "blaxploitation" films of the 1960s and '70s, such as "Super Fly."

"It's important for black youth to see films - particularly some of the older ones - that

depict blacks in subservient roles," Johnson said. "You have to see where we've been."

He also intends to include live entertainment and turn the place into a community entertainment center. Jazz bands will perform before Saturday night shows, and magicians before the matinees.

Johnson wants to provide an outlet for independent black filmmakers like Julie Dash, who won critical acclaim for her 1992 film "Daughters of the Dust," and Haile Gerima, who drew large audiences with "Sankofa" in 1994.

"I'm hoping schools will take advantage because these films need to be viewed and studied," said the NAACP's Madison. "There are a lot of lessons to be learned."

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Winfrey donates black angels

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BELOIT, Wis. - For Oprah Winfrey's collection of 571 black angels, heaven is a place called Beloit.

The popular television talk show host announced this week she was donating the collection to the city's Angel

Museum.

Winfrey's collection got a jump start after she told Cher during one of the programs that black angels were hard to find. She was inundated with so many that she soon pleaded with viewers to stop sending them.

Joyce Berg, whose original

collection of 11,680 angels was the inspiration for the museum, said Winfrey's gems would be a delightful addition.

"It's a very wonderful thing for us," Berg said Wednesday. "They will be special, definitely special. I imagine there'll be some ones that are lovingly

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Always Celebrating: MLK Parade Chairperson Louis Sellars (L), Parade Grand Marshals, State Representative Beverly Earle and Bell South's Bob Freeman (C) along with driver of the lead car Ed Newland (R). Take time to pose for a picture before this year's annual parade honoring the birthday of the great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"COCA-COLA/FOOD LION CIAA DREAMSTAKES"

The Coca-Cola Community Connection Staff encourages you to stop by your neighborhood Food Lion, look for the Coca-Cola display and enter for your chance to win the CIAA Basketball Tournament Dreamstakes. Grand prize winners will receive tickets for two to the semi-final and championship games, hotel accommodations and \$500 dollars spending money

"LOVE FOR TEENS"

Fighting Back Youth United, The Drug Education Center and Earth Service Corps is sponsoring a Valentines Day Love For Teens Dance, featuring DJ Marky D. It is happening Friday, February 14th from 7:00 PM - 10:30 PM at McCrorey YMCA

"GOLDEN BULLS BASKETBALL"

The Johnson C. Smith University Golden Bulls invite you out to Brayboy Gymnasium as they make their final home stand before the CIAA Tournament. They host the Falcons of Saint Augustine's College on February 15th and the Spartans of Norfolk State University, February 18th. For ticket information call 378-3505

"COMMUNITY YOUTH CONFERENCE"

Calling All Youth... There will be a community youth conference where the youth speak and adults listen. There will be discussion on gangs, violence, drug abuse and much much more. It takes place Saturday, February 22nd starting at 10:00 AM at the Grady Cole Center. Call 598-3988 for more information.

"DADDY WHERE ARE YOU"

Cast members of the hit play Daddy Where Are You and the Coca-Cola Music Van will be at the Greenville Community Center, Monday, February 15th from 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM. Stop by and meet stars Deitra Dean, Larry Mims, Emanuel Seegars and enter your name for a chance to win free tickets to the play. For details call 335-3100.

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If you are interested in the Coca-Cola Community Music Van appearing at your non-profit event call: 393-4365 • FAX 393-4265



Keeping The Dream Alive: Members of the Second Calvary Baptist Church show their support by marching in the parade that began at West Charlotte High School and concluded with a ceremony at the New Charlotte Convention Center. "The parade was a tremendous success due to the overwhelming number of participants and spectators that supported this year's event" says Teresa Wright, MLK Parade Coordinator.

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