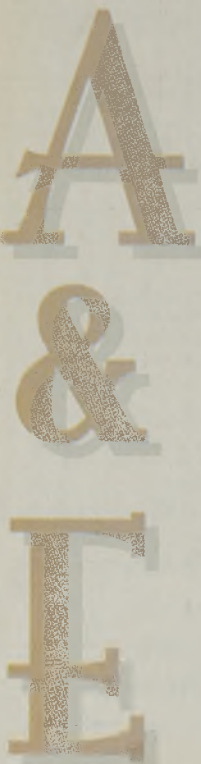


D Section



Atlanta-based singer Rhonda Thomas will bring her style of soul jazz to the Jazz Cafe this evening. Thomas has sang back-up for soul legend Issac Hayes.

# No doubting Thomas

## Jazz stylist makes her own mark with 'Breathe New Life'

By Cheris F. Hodges  
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When Rhonda Thomas comes to the Jazz Café on Arslay Town Boulevard, she's bringing her unique style jazz/funk back to Charlotte.

Thomas, an Atlanta-based singer, has a new album, "Breathe New Life," and she's ready to introduce everyone to her style.

"I've been singing since I was seven," she said.

That experience paid off when Thomas won first place at the Apollo Theatre in the late 1980s. She was 15 at the time. When she went to school at Hampton University in Virginia, there was no question as to what her major would be.

"I was a jazz vocalist major for a

year," she said.

Wanting to strike out on her own, Thomas left Virginia and headed to the soul Mecca of Atlanta.

"I got hooked up in the jazz scene here and some musicians that work with Isaac Hayes contacted me and wanted me to sing back up," she said.

Hayes was so impressed with her music that he called her "a breath of fresh air."

"She has the quality, vocal timbre and vibrato of Deniece Williams when she goes high. There are a lot of vocal sounds in this young woman," he said on her web site.

Though she may get lumped into the neo-soul category, she said her music is more of "soul jazz."

"For me, jazz is the pulse of most music," she said. "Growing up in my

house, I was privy to a lot of different styles of music."

She said she calls her music soul jazz because those are her favorite styles of music. But if she had her way, the music wouldn't be labeled at all.

"I like to define my own music," she said. "I'm not opposed to people equating my music to neo-soul."

She just doesn't call it that.

"Because I'm not signed to a major label, I can get away with it more readily," Thomas said.

Like many of the artists who have come from the Atlanta underground soul scene, Thomas can sing. She's performed with artists like India Arie and Donnie as well as the jazz group Incognito.

She's been highlighted in JazzTimes magazine as well.



# 'West Wing' flies in 6th season

West Wing Complete  
Sixth Season  
Dulle Hill, Martin Sheen, Jimmy Smits, Alon Alda, Allison Janney, Stockard Channing, Richard Schiff and Bradley Whitford  
Warner Home Video



The first four seasons of "The West Wing" were unrivaled by anything on television. Brilliant writing and acting established this series position in dramatic television history.

Alas, the creators left in a huff over stuff at NBC, sending season five into a creative dive. The show went from tremendous to just OK.

But by midseason six, "The West Wing" found its stride again. It wasn't the old show but was morphing into something as good. Established characters were thrown into different roles. The turmoil in the White House continued but shifted to other areas and the race to elect a new president was on.

The presidential thing was the arch for the entire season. Alan Alda and Jimmy Smits returned as rivals for the presidency. Alda as Republican Arnold Vinick and Smits as Democrat Matthew Santos gave this show the boost it needed.

The other stuff was cool, too. The office began speaking in that breakneck pace that made this show so watchable. Josh, C.J., Toby and even president Bartlett (Bradley Whitford, Allison Janney, Richard Schiff and the magnificent Martin Sheen respectively) were back to their loveably annoying selves. The writing was also back up to speed.

The DVD has a special Easter Egg (hidden stuff) that features a conversation with the late John Spencer, who was wonderful as Leo. Janney also gets a feature chronicling her rise from press secretary to Chief of Staff. Twenty-two episodes are spread about six discs done in Dolby Digital sound.

Please see THE N WORD/2D



# Use of racial slur conjures endearment and disdain

By Cheris F. Hodges  
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On Memorial Day weekend, CNN aired a segment on the N-word - nigger for those who don't know.

Tony Harris and Michael Eric Dyson talked over the phone about the word, which is as controversial as it is commonplace.

I can't write this piece and say that I've never uttered the word. But I can say I don't like it.

That's one of the reasons that I don't listen to much rap

music. On the flip side, I love "The Boondocks." If you've seen the animated series on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim, you know that the word is used a lot.

"Dyson said it's a term of endearment."

He told Harris "It is a term of love and acceptance and embrace. But let's not-let's not be dishonest. It also can be used as a term of directing venom and disdain."

And that's the rub. How can the N-word ever be seen as a loving term? On

the occasions when I said it or thought it, there was no love behind it. And I never walk up to my friends and say, what's up my N-word. That's just not cool.

But you can't deny that it's a part of black culture. And it confuses white people. Young suburban white men purchase hip-hop records. They may be able to quote 50 Cent while rolling in their Jeeps with their buds, but what happens when they drop the N-bomb in a crowd of black men who are listening to the

same music and saying the same word?

Beat down. Dyson told Harris that "black people determined, almost from the beginning of use of that term, to take it and take the poison out of it by circulating among ourselves, similar to but not, you know, as when gay people take a term of derision, queer, and use it among themselves or other groups."

That statement made my head spin. And it's also making a trial in New York very

interesting.

A white man is accused of beating a black man while shouting the n-word. His defenders are saying that because the N-word is a term of endearment, there is no hate crime.

Jill Merritt and Kovan Flowers, founders of the web site AbolishTheNWord.com have no love for the slur.

"It's not a term of endearment. It is racial, a derogatory racial epithet. It always

### BOOK REVIEW

## 'Crazy' like a Foxx: Novel breaks new literary ground

By Cheris F. Hodges  
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What do you do when your fiancé leaves you without a goodbye? If you're Alexis Pearson, you cut your hair, take martial arts classes, break a man's arm and strike out on your own.

Welcome to Nina Foxx's new novel, "Just Short of Crazy." This book is one funny ride into the life of a truly unique literary character.

Alexis is a lawyer whose life changes when Walter walks away from their impending nuptials. Alexis still has to help her cousin with her wedding plans and everyone in her family thinks that she and Walter should get back together. But she's found a "Remedy" for her broken heart in club owner Remedy Brown. But he has his own baggage in the form of a crazy ex-wife and a small son.

Foxx's storytelling style sucks you in from the first page. You find yourself cheering for Alexis and her transformation. But you also worry that something is going to go down between her and Remedy's ex.

Ayzah Brown is a very ghetto character, but she has a heart. As the story goes on, you begin to see the depth of the characters and each tug at your heartstrings. The action progresses quickly and

there are many unexpected twists and turns that make you want to zip through the novel at top speed.

What I like about Foxx's style is that the characters aren't over the top and it feels as if you're looking into your next door neighbor's backdoor.

Her book also takes you away. You can feel the Texas heat as you read and the love scenes are hot, even when you're reading about Ayzah's

beau cheating.

Hopefully Foxx will return to Ayzah's story, since she's the character in the book that changed and grew the most.

Alexis' relationship with Remedy takes many twists and turns and when her ex returns, you wonder if she's going to take him back to make her overbearing aunt happy. This is one book that needs to head to the beach or the pool with you this summer.

# Author breaks mold to create new breed of Christian fiction

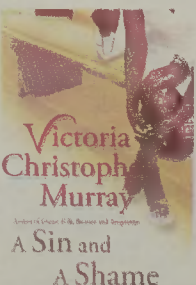
By Cheris F. Hodges  
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When Victoria Christopher Murray wrote her first novel, she created a new genre.

Now she's back with "A Sin and A Shame," continuing to revolutionize what is considered Christian fiction.

Murray said when she wrote "Temptation" she wasn't writing a Christian fiction novel.

At the time, Denise Stinson was her literary agent and



she couldn't sell the novel to a publisher. So, Murray said, Stinson started her own company, Walk Worthy Press.

"Christian publishers thought my book was too mainstream and mainstream publishers thought it was too religious," Murray said.

But what her books are and have become are bestsellers. Though there is a spiritual basis in her books, Murray said that she tries to show different perspectives in her novels.

Take her latest, for instance, the main character Jasmine Larson is a very unlikable character, but she's trying to change. In "Temptation" Jasmine seduced her best friend's husband. Now she's trying to be a better Christian.

"Jasmine prays the sinner's prayer but she stops there," Murray said. Because Jasmine continues to bed a married man and when she meets the man she wants to marry, she'll stop at nothing to get

him.

"I tried to write her as a flawed individual who carried a spirit of lust with her," Murray said.

Whether readers love or hate Jasmine is up to them, she said.

"What I love about talking to readers is that you bring who you are to the reading experience," Murray said.

Her best friend and best selling author Kimberly Lawson Roby, didn't like Jas-

Please see SEQUEL /2D

### DVD Ratings

Classic:	☆☆☆☆☆
Excellent:	☆☆☆☆
Good:	☆☆☆☆
Fair:	☆☆☆☆
Why?:	☆☆☆☆
No stars - A mess:	☆☆☆☆

