African American romance novels

Continued from page 1D

ber Love," was released in 2003 and next month, she will release her eighth-"In The Midst of Passion," the story of a prominent Charlotte newspaper publisher struggling to distance himself from his former life as a violent member of the criminal underworld. When publisher Alexander Rice meets ravishing garage owner Topaz Emerson, who has drawn the attention of every man in town and the ire of most women, he's hooked. Their relationship burns slowly as Alex tries to protect Topaz from an aggressive real estate magnate who is using brute force to buy up businesses on Topaz's block. When their relationship heats up, Alex's secrets drive him to keep Topaz at a distance. Pushing toward a dangerous confrontation with the crooked men behind Lockhurst Properties, Alex finds he must spill his secrets and face his past head on, risking the love he and Topaz share in order to protect her.

"When I started writing, the African American romance market was scant-just in the baby stages," Washington said. She believes the interest of the readers has pushed the industry along.

"Sharing my work with these women and men has been a wonderful experience," she said.

For literary agents who sell manuscripts to publishers, their jobs have become easier.

Sha-Shana Crichton, president of Crichton and Associates Literary Agency, said "The market has really opened up. The publishers are looking for great well written romance books."

The current trend, she added, is for contemporary novels that are similar to the TV program "Girlfriends."

But in many areas of the romance market, the door is still closed to black writers, she said.

"The market is still closed to historical romances, unless you're Beverly Jenkins. We could use some help in that department," Crichton said.

Like most aspects of the industry, publishers don't print what won't make money and Deborah Schumaker, executive editor at Genesis Press, said black romance novels are profitable. This year, Genesis released more than 30 novels, she said.

"Next year we're going into mass market ad we're going to reissue some titles," she said.

Schumaker said Genesis and Harlequin will both benefit from the attention being paid to African American romances.

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Tennessee touts state for new movie projects

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn.—State officials hope to attract more filmmakers to Tennessee by offering them $10 million in rebates and other incentives.

Tennessee has lost movie and television projects to Canada, Romania and southern states such as Louisiana and North Carolina because it hasn't been able to match the perks the other areas offer, said David Bennett, executive director of the Tennessee Film, Entertainment and Music Commission.

"We're going to be good stewards of the money," Bennett said. "I'm certain we're going to be able to bring a lot of projects here quickly with it."

The $10 million, nonrecurring fund—part of Gov. Phil Bredesen's $26.1 billion fiscal 2007 budget—will allow state officials to offer rebates on money spent in-state on production above a threshold, not including producers' and stars' salaries. That threshold and the amount of the rebate are yet to be determined though Bennett said it will be in the 13 percent to 15 percent range, comparable to North Carolina's. Plus, additional credits may be earned for hiring Tennessee cast and crew.

The fund will be available for use next year and it's in addition to sales tax rebates for expenditures above $500,000 that already are in effect for out-of-state production companies.

The Memphis-made Johnny Cash biopic, "Walk the Line," was almost made in Louisiana because of better incentives.

Producers for the Oscar-winning film shot over 45 days in Nashville and Memphis in 2004, spent about $10 million in the state and created an economic impact of nearly $20 million, according to the film commission.

Bredesen formed a committee last year to study other states' incentive programs, and it recommended a program similar to Louisiana's, which offers a 25 percent tax break for films—one of the highest in the country. But Bredesen rejected the proposal.

"It was hard to determine how much that tax incentive would ultimately cost, and that unknown was something we didn't want to deal with," said Robert Gowan, a senior advisor to Bredesen.

Instead, the legislators passed the 2006 Visual Content Act, creating the $10 million fund in the budget, which Bredesen signed into law last month.

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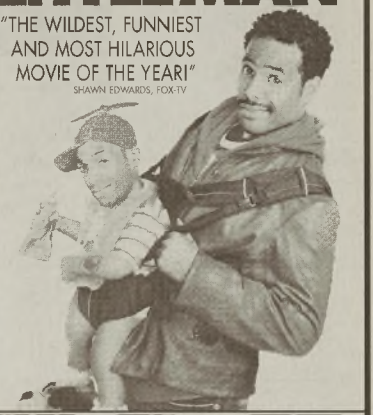

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U.S. album sales down 4.2 percent in first half

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES—U.S. album sales were down 4.2 percent in the first half of the year, but sales of music downloaded online soared 77 percent, according to industry figures.

Total sales of albums across different formats—CDs, digital albums, cassettes and others—stood at 270.6 million between Jan. 2 and July 2, compared to 282.6 million in the same period last year, according to Nielsen SoundScan figures released Friday.

The country music genre saw a 17.7 percent increase in sales over the first half of 2005, the highest percentage of all.

The top-selling album so far this year is a soundtrack inspired by the Disney Channel movie "High School Musical," which has sold more than 2.6 million units.

Albums by Rascal Flatts, James Blunt, Mary J. Blige and Carrie Underwood round out the top five.

The decline reflects in part a dearth of big hits compared to the same period in 2005, which saw Mariah Carey and rapper 50 Cent each release multi-platinum sellers.

"Considering that you haven't had a 50 Cent to be the Pied Piper during the first half of the year or a Norah Jones the year before that, being behind 4 percent in album sales is really not that bad," said Geoff Mayfield, director of charts for music tracker Billboard.

The R&B genre accounted for the biggest slice of all albums sold so far this year with 53,806, but also represented the biggest percentage drop — 22.4 percent —in units sold by genre from the same period last year.

While the CD remains the dominant album format despite a sales decline in all but one of the last five years, music fans have been increasingly buying digital downloads of single tracks and full albums.

Nearly 281 million digital singles were purchased through July 2, compared to 158.8 million in the time frame last year. More than 14 million full-album downloads were purchased in the first six months of this year, more than double the 6.5 million bought in the first half of 2005.

The growth of online music purchases is a mixed blessing for recording companies, however. Such sales often come at the expense of more profitable album sales as music fans opt to cherry pick a few songs online instead of purchasing a whole album.

"Digital distribution is an answer to the consumer who's been throwing up that complaint," Mayfield said. "It's a changing dynamic that the industry still needs to get its arms around."

'Gee's Bend' blankets the senses

Continued from page 1D

stitching which is delightful as it looks like joyous ants are running across this patriotic field of red and blue and white material with green accents. The prints inspired by the quilts equate to the work of other noted fine artists.

The etching and aquatint, "Going Home," by Louisa Bendolph features small crimson, dark blue, and yellow rectangles on a paler yellow background. There is a visual lightness and a melodic rhythm in this image that is similar to the work of Henri Matisee.

Another etching and aquatint, "American Housetops (For the Arnetts)," by Louisiana Bendolph features angular red shapes that remind me of an artist whose work is not seen enough, American painter and printmaker Jack Youngerman.

"MayDay"

The exhibit continues at Jerald Melberg Gallery through September 2. Summer hours are Mondays through Fridays from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturdays by appointment. For additional information, call the gallery at (704) 365-3000

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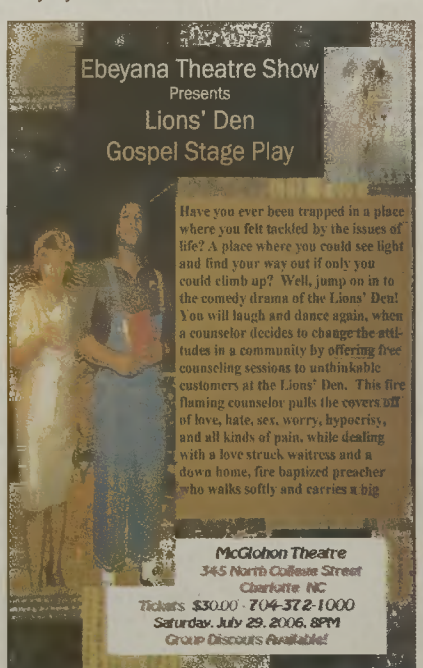

COCA-COLA "CITIZEN" OF THE MONTH
"Leroy Fields"
McCrorey YMCA
Board Member

Coca-Cola Community Connection

Quote:
"I believe in the YMCA, not only because of the Christian formation, but because I love to see our youth being nurtured and groomed properly.
- Leroy Fields

Since 1991, our *"Citizen of the Month," Leroy Fields,* found a place in his heart for McCrorey YMCA. His first visit to the facility was a company assignment to repair HVAC problems. He soon noticed not only were there extensive technical problems, McCrorey was missing the level of volunteers other area YMCAs were enjoying. As Leroy and then executive Howard Jones developed a friendship, Jones invited him to join the board. Pegged as a soft but pushy Yankee in his first involvement with a capital campaign, Fields brought in five new annual corporate contributors. Realizing his level of commitment, the board soon deemed him a lifetime member. Leroy continues to be a member of the facility committee which he formerly chaired. You can find Leroy each Wednesday canvassing the property at McCrorey just to make sure the site is "up to snuff."

A native of Alberta, VA, Leroy graduated from James Solomon Russell High School in Lawrenceville, VA, joined the Army in 1955, and completed his tour of duty in 1957. After working in factories for five years, Leroy entered Apex Technical School in New York, earning an HVAC degree. This accomplishment landed him several managerial and supervisory positions. Still not quite satisfied, Leroy entered NYU to earn a degree in engineering and design. A country boy at heart, in 1984 when his daughter graduated from Howard University, Leroy relocated to Charlotte to join the Padgett Company, and retired in 2003. Still possessing the desire to improve the quality of life in Charlotte, Leroy opened a small technical service company, Leroy Fields HVAC Service Company in 2004.

Leroy's community involvement does not stop with the YMCA. He prides himself in being a dedicated block captain for the Lake Forest homeowners association.

Leroy is married to Allen Tate Realtor/Broker Jean Fields. He has three grown children; Jocelyn Fields Carter and Brian Fields in Mt. Vernon, N.Y., and Arlene Fields Billingsley of Atlanta, eight grandchildren and three great-grand-daughters. Leroy is a member of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, where he is very active singing on the men's choir, and a member of the security and culinary teams.

Best Wishes "Leroy" from
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