

Blind Boys Make Believers Out of Cradle Audience

By JOANNA PEARSON
Staff Writer

If the second coming had happened Sunday night, I would have been right there. When Jesus does come back, he's going to look for The Blind Boys of Alabama — and from the way they sing, Jesus shouldn't have a hard time finding them.

The Blind Boys performed at the Cat's

Cradle, transforming the place from a smoke-filled den of slinkers into a room of rollicking, hand-clapping folks just hollering for the Holy Spirit to descend.

As group leader Clarence Fountain told the crowd, "We didn't come to Carrboro looking for Jesus. ... We brought him with us!"

That seemed true enough, from the way the Blind Boys, dressed in black silk jackets and shiny orange dress shirts, grooved with a kind of take-me-home-sweet-Lord fervor. These men are getting old, but they still have spunk — and it's no surprise, since 2001 was a good

year for them and their well-received release "Spirit of the Century."

The Blind Boys of Alabama are literally just that — a group of men who met at the Talladega Institute for the Deaf and Blind in Alabama in the 1930s. They've been making a joyful noise ever since, singing in a gospel style known, appropriately enough, as "jubilee."

The group has been recording since 1948, but it wasn't until 1988 that group members enjoyed mainstream success as stars of the Broadway musical "Gospel at Colonus." Since then, they have received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, performed at a number of prestigious blues festivals and received three Grammy nominations.

The Blind Boys are essentially the standard-bearer in popular music for the gospel world, as the genre's most successful crossover group.

And it's easy to see why. For starters, these are talented musicians. From deep bass on up, when they put their voices together, the sound is so full-bodied and rich you feel it viscerally. To top it off, these men know how to put on a show.

They are charismatic, born performers.

Fountain, as mentioned, is full of quips for the crowd: "If you're not feelin' it, it's not our business" and "You've gotta keep the devil down in the hole." He also has a penchant for jumping up out of his seat, pulling his jacket back, and thrusting one hip out sex-icon fashion.

Vocalist Jimmy Carter got so excited singing about being a soldier of the Lord, that he started jumping up and down. Then, with the help of a sighted friend, he made his way down through the crowd, working up a call-and-response like a country preacher at a revival.

My only complaint was that their set was so short — but really, it's remarkable that these men are still out touring. And musicians like these need to tour more often — singing their guts out, feeding off the crowd's applause, eating up all the attention and jumping up and down with enthusiasm.

God bless them, it was a good show. Listen to them, and you'll be a Blind Boys convert too.

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Socially Conscious 'John Q' Takes Health Care Hostage

By EVAN LUCAS
Staff Writer

If your child were desperately ill and in need of a heart transplant, how far would you go to make sure he received the necessary treatment? This situation is what Denzel Washington finds himself dealing with in his most recent film, "John Q."

Washington plays a poor factory worker in desperate need of money to support his family. John Q. Archibald's life is turned upside down when it is determined that his son needs a heart transplant, a surgery that costs upward of \$250,000.

John tries everything he can think of to raise the money. His insurance doesn't cover procedures of such magnitude, and because he does have insurance, he is not eligible to receive aid from Medicare and other similar agencies.

When the hospital decides to release his son, John does something drastic — he holds the emergency room hostage.

The movie goes downhill from this point. The only thing that holds it together is excellent acting on the parts of Washington and Robert Duvall, who plays Frank Grimes, the policeman in charge of the situation.

After John takes over the emergency room, the film becomes very predictable. John's actions seem to follow

the typical path of a man holding people hostage, despite Washington's good acting.

He threatens the police, saying he will kill the hostages, and he refuses to argue with negotiator Grimes.

But there are still a few surprises, most notably John's kindness toward the people he is holding hostage. He even lets a wounded victim into the emergency room after he has taken control.

The film itself, however, appears to be an extended editorial on the health-care system of the United States and the flaws present in it. The filmmakers succeed in making their point, but only at the cost of including it in scenes where it doesn't belong.

In one scene, John is talking to his hostages about HMOs and the problems they cause for the health-care system. This scene seems forced and is not necessary considering that the movie is entirely about one man's struggle with the system.

But the most disappointing aspect of the film is how people of authority are represented.

The film assumes the stereotype that people in charge will abuse their power and will always put their personal goals over all else.

For example, when the chief of police comes in and takes over the situation for Grimes, his demeanor is completely stereotypical of a police chief.

Instead of waiting things out as Grimes would prefer, the police chief decides to attempt to end things quickly by sending in a sniper to kill John.

His reason for this, as he explains to Grimes, is that he does not want to hurt his own image in an election year. He never thinks about what would be best for John.

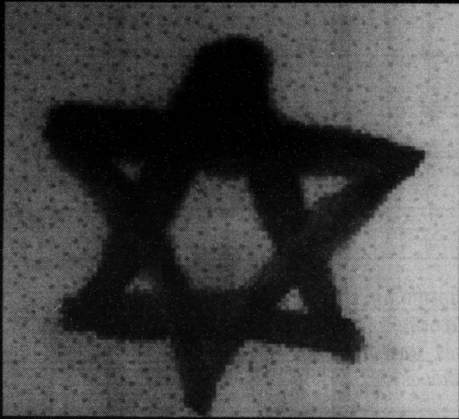
Despite all of this, the film manages to maintain some amount of interest.

Most people can relate to the type of situation that John has found himself in, and despite the absurdity of his actions, you still find yourself rooting for him.

And while "John Q." might need a little medical attention of its own, the film holds together. If nothing else, this movie has plenty of heart.

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Nie Weider! Never Again!



"I was in that shack hiding for over two years.
Never went outside."

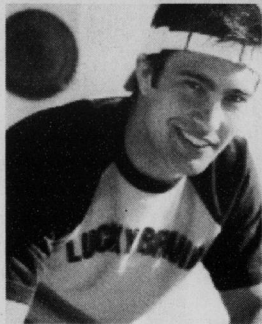
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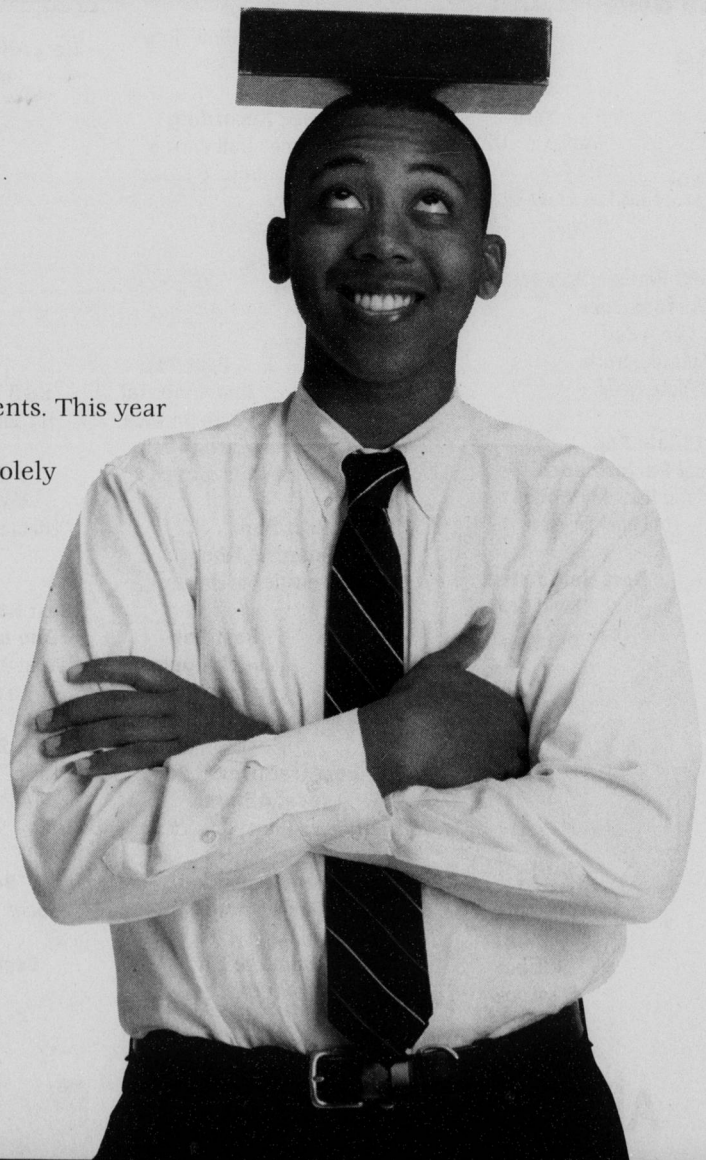
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