

# entertainment

## Black Films Aim For Wider Audience

(AP)—The Cinedome Theatre, a multiplex in a mostly white, middle-class neighborhood in Sacramento, Calif., usually plays mainstream movies: *Hook*, *The Addams Family*, *Beauty and the Beast*.

But this summer Cinedome also ran *Boys N the Hood*, a drama by a 23-year-old black director set in a Los Angeles ghetto. In the fall, the multiplex featured another black film, *House Party II*, a hip-hop flavored campus comedy.

"I think the white audience is taking a greater interest in the films being made by the black filmmakers," explained Jack Myhill, general manager of Syfy Enterprises, which owns and operates the Cinedome and other theaters in five states. "These are quality films, and that's really what people want to see. The film is what it's all about."

Still, for every theater like the Cinedome, many more refuse to show movies made by African-American filmmakers or with black themes. Spike Lee, John Singleton, Ernest Dickerson and other filmmakers may have succeeded in cracking Hollywood discrimination and getting their movies made, but they've had a harder time getting them seen.

Lee's acclaimed *Jungle Fever* didn't reach as many screens as the critical and commercial flop *Drop Dead Fred*. Singleton's *Boys N the Hood*, which pulled in more than \$50 million at the box office, received less exposure than the quickly forgotten *Point Break*. Dickerson's *Juice* opened recently to favorable reviews, but the widely panned *Kuffs* had a wider distribution.

Some blame the studios for insuf-

ficient support; others say the films' subject matter gives them limited appeal. But whether it's racism or simply a matter of what the market will bear, the same formula seems to apply: black films for black people.

"I think it's because of the way distributors and retailers view black films," said Fred Rashid, the NAACP's national director for economic development.

"They just try to put them in predominantly black areas. I think films are pretty much looked at the same way as records are. They label it as black music or pop music, and that's the way they market it. The studios pretty much label and so do the people who distribute the film."

"There are films that you can't open in the middle of a white, cracker neighborhood," added Mark Gill, Columbia Pictures' senior vice president of publicity. "There is

racism in America and we're fools to ignore it."

Racism of one kind or another long has existed in the motion picture industry and black directors and producers continue to have an uphill struggle. Independent black filmmakers emerged in the 1920s when more than 100 black film companies made low-budget, primarily B movies for black theaters. The most notable filmmakers of this time included Noble and George Johnson, and Oscar Micheaux, who made Paul Robeson's first movie, *Body and Soul*, in 1924.

But today's filmmakers want their movies to be seen by everyone. Some, such as Matty Rich (*Straight Out of Brooklyn*) and Charles Burnett (*To Sleep with Anger*) even debut their works at the more prestigious international film festivals where they hope to get the attention of a wider audience.

The number of screens a film might reach can range from just a handful for an art picture to more than 2,000 for *Terminator 2* or *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.

In between, how much exposure a movie gets depends on any number of factors: timing, commercial appeal, marketing strategy. Some movies, such as *Boys N the Hood*, open at a small number of theaters and gradually expand. Others, such as *Mobsters* and *Body Parts*, debut on a large number of screens and quickly disappear.

Either way, the most successful black movies have yet to get the kind of exposure given to many inferior, white films. *House Party II* peaked at 1,185 screens last fall, according to figures compiled by Exhibitor Relations, which puts out the weekly box-office listings. That's the highest in memory for a black movie without Eddie Murphy, but still well short of *Mystery Date* or *Pure Luck*, two movies that quickly came and went.

"When any distributor looks to market a film, they want it to be a synergy between the content of the film and the neighborhood it's in," said Steve Rothenberg, senior vice president of theatrical distribution for the Samuel Goldwyn Company, which has released *Straight Out of Brooklyn*, and such black art films as *To Sleep With Anger*.

"You have the cost of advertising, the costs of the prints. You add up all those costs and try to make a rational business decision. Typically, it makes sense to play these films in roughly 700-1,000 theaters. Beyond that, it has been proven the films don't do any business."

"There are, unfortunately, theater owners, and in some cases, mayors and chiefs of police, who did not want *House Party II* playing in their neighborhoods," said Mitch Goldman, sales manager for New Line Cinema, which distributed the film. "They said it was for fear of problems, law enforcement problems."

"And the commercial success of *Boys N the Hood* and *New Jack City* was a factor in our ability to get into so many theaters. A lot of people did more business than expected on those films and were more willing to take a chance."

### UNC Concert To Revive Sounds Of Sousa Band

CHAPEL HILL—It won't be the Sousa band but it will look and sound like the Sousa band. The UNC Symphonic Band, conducted by James Hile, will present a costumed turn-of-the-century park concert in Memorial Hall on the UNC campus Saturday, Feb. 15, at 8 p.m. The concert will feature a concert presentation in the same style that John Philip Sousa used to entertain large audiences and which made him a household name throughout the United States.

The concert will feature overtures such as Von Suppe's "Post and Peasant" and Sousa's "Mars and Venus." Professor James Ketch will be featured as a soloist in the name of the famed cornet virtuoso Herbert L. Clarke.

The concert will also feature novelty numbers and music of the great composers, fulfilling Sousa's dual function of entertaining the audience and bringing the best music available to the public.

Tickets are available at the UNC band office (919-962-5695) or at the UNC Music Department (919-962-1039). Tickets will also be available at the door.

### Group Plans For Black-Oriented MBC TV Network

BY BARRY COOPER

Can black America support another black-oriented television network? Yes, say a group of enterprising African-American businessmen.

Plans are now being formed for the nation's second black network. BET, offered through cable companies, has been a hit. Now the Minority Broadcasting Corporation, based in Dallas, says it will fill a niche of its own.

Backers of MBC say the network will be made available, free of charge, in selected cities. MBC won't be offered on cable. Instead, viewers will receive the signal in the same manner in which they receive local stations. So far, about 10 independent stations have shown interest, according to MBC.

Alvin D. James, chairman of MBC, said offering MBC "over the air," will make it attractive.

"We are going to be the first free over-the-air network for the black community," James told reporters at a trade show in New Orleans. "We are positioning MBC in the marketplace as the prime conduit for independent producers for minority programming."

No one can tell if MBC will become a reality. But James and his partners have some impressive shows lined up, and they hope to begin operations this fall.

Shows in the works include "Sports Lifestyles," which will star Stedman Graham—Oprah Winfrey's friend. It's not clear whether Graham's show will be produced by Winfrey's production company.

Other shows lined up are "Good Morning Black America," "Fame and Fortune," a talent show; and "Minorities Speak to the Nation," a 60-minute talk show.

If MBC gains the backing it needs, it could be a boon for black households. Aside from sitcoms, very little programming by the major networks has a black theme.

Initially, MBC plans to offer six hours of programming per day, with the eventual goal being 24 hours of coverage per day.



**SUPREME SACRIFICE** — Sam (Scott Bakula) "leaps" into a black teenage girl who sings My Boyfriend's Back, Heat Wave and Do You Love Me as a member of a 60s "girl group" and must prevent a fellow vocalist (guest star Tammy Townsend) from alienating her stifling minister father (guest star Harrison Page) by signing an exploitative contract with a sleazy manager (guest star Eric LaSalle) on NBC-TV's Quantum Leap Wednesday, Feb. 26, 10-11 p.m.

### Michael Jackson Fan Sentenced For Larceny

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—A Michael Jackson fan was sentenced to two years probation last week for stealing the singer's trademark white, sequined glove from the Motown Museum.

Detroit Recorder's Court Judge Dominick Carnovale also sentenced 23-year-old Bruce M. Hays of Flint to 20 hours of community service on a felony charge of larceny inside a building.

"You think I'm going to put him in prison?" Carnovale asked Hays' attorney, Craig Freeman, before the sentencing.

Hays, wearing a gray pinstriped suit, sat impassively between his mother and a sister. He declined comment.

"Sure I'm relieved," said Hays' mother, Pamela, after the sentencing. "Jail was always a possibility."

Hays faced up to 12 years' imprisonment for stealing the crystal-beaded glove on Oct. 2, 1991 from the museum.

The glove worn by Jackson during his "Thriller" video was kept in a locked glass case in a room devoted to Jackson memorabilia.

Before the sentencing, Hays gave Carnovale a typed statement that said police before arresting him took turns posing for photographs with Jackson's glove.

The theft took place while eight employees and two visitors were in the museum, officials said. Police said Hays removed hinges on the case to reach the glove, then replaced the hinges.

Two days later, Hays surrendered to police in Flint, about 75 miles northwest of Detroit, after investigators received an anonymous tip.

Jackson donated the glove along with a hat and \$125,000 in 1988. He wore the sequined glove on a 1983 television program honoring the 25th anniversary of the founding of Motown Records.

The theft led to greater security measures at the museum, situated in a house where the Motown music empire was founded, said director Esther Gordy Edwards.

The theft also prompted rap star Hammer to offer a \$50,000 reward for the return of the glove. Hammer set up a special telephone line to Capitol Records for people to call with information about the glove.

Jackson's 1982 *Thriller* is one of the most popular albums of all time, with more than 50 million copies sold.



**CARTOUCHE** — Jean-Paul Visser, left, and Myrille Tholen, right, combine their talents of singing/rapping/dancing performing on the dance club scene with one of the sleeper hits of the year, *Feel The Groove*.



**IMAGINARY FRIENDS** — Ella Jenkins, children's folk singer, is a guest on an all-new week about *Imaginary Friends* on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, premiering in most areas February 24-28 on PBS. Through her song, Jenkins invites children to imagine and pretend. "The ability to imagine is one of the most useful tools children need for their learning," says Rogers and focuses this week on imagination and children's use of imaginary friends. This segment is part of the program scheduled for Feb. 28.

### Marilyn McCoo Sparkles With Pop-Gospel Album

"For the last couple of years I've been concerned about the quality of contemporary song lyrics," said Marilyn McCoo. "Some of them are so negative and oriented toward irresponsible behavior. There's so often not enough hope."

That's why she's particularly thrilled that her album, *The Me Nobody Knows*, has been nominated for a Grammy in the pop gospel album category.

She first performed the title song publicly before a live audience at the Children's Miracle Network Telethon at Disneyland, but she was most concerned about how it would go over at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles for the reunion performance of the Original 5th Dimension.

"I didn't know what the response would be, but I was determined to do these songs," she said of the gospel numbers. "I was pleasantly surprised when I received a standing ovation." After the single came out, she received further validation of its value when she got a letter from a suicidal young woman, who, upon hearing the song on the radio, wrote that it had given her new hope and that she didn't feel so alone anymore.

The present Grammy nomination is her first as a solo artist, although she and her husband, Billy Davis,



MARILYN MCCOO

Jr., won a Grammy (best R&B vocal performance by a duo) for "You Don't Have to Be a Star (To Be in My Show)." When she sang with the 5th Dimension, the group won six Grammys.

She is particularly pleased with "Did We Forget About Love?", one of the songs on her current album. It's the first song she has co-written that's also been recorded and it will be her next single. "It's about getting so caught up in our own lives that we forget about other human beings who are in need—that's not what God had in mind for us," she said.

### Sonny Rollins To Bring Indomitable Style Here

For over four decades, Sonny Rollins has been blowing away the competition. On Saturday, Feb. 22, at 8 p.m., the indomitable, ever-riveting Rollins brings his group to NCSU's Stewart Theatre as part of the Center Stage season.

Always a stunning performer, and arguably the greatest jazz tenor saxophone alive, Sonny Rollins has wooed and wowed audiences for years. Just out of high school he began jamming with the likes of Bud Powell and Fats Navarro, and by the early '50s was recording and performing with Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk. Rollins credits Ornette Coleman and Lester Young, however, with having the greatest influence on his style.

Like Coleman, Rollins has a gift for improvisation—playing free,

and often playing fast and loose with the old standards. But unlike many improvisers, Rollins always keeps the melody within earshot, recognizable somewhere under the amalgam of bebop, calypso, dance rhythms and avant garde that inform his unique, swaggering style. The beauty of what Rollins does with a tune doesn't lie in a lush or remarkable beginning—it unfolds from anything as banal as "I'm An Old Cowhand" or "Tennessee Waltz" into a single, splendid tapestry when Rollins makes his magic.

Wildly imaginative yet remarkably logical inventions flow nonstop from his staccato bursts, rapidly and clearly articulated runs and sustained notes. From aggressive to lyrical, his tone can be almost conversational at times. And this is one man whose sax has a lot to say.

### Standup Comedienne Takes UNC Spotlight

CHAPEL HILL—Bertice Berry, the most popular young comedienne on the college circuit—she was voted the 1991 National Association of Campus Activities Comedian of the Year—in comedy clubs and on television, will appear at 9 p.m. Feb. 14, in the Great Hall in the Frank Porter Graham Student Union Building on the UNC campus.

A multi-talented woman, who was told by her high-school counselor she was not college material, Ms. Berry is:

- a) A Ph.D. graduate in sociology and former university professor who happens to be funny.
- b) A comedienne who happens to be scholarly.
- c) A gifted lecturer/speaker with a comic edge.
- d) A comic with a serious message

on stage.

e) All of the above. She has been described as either the Bill Cosby of sociology or the Doctor of Comedy. Or both. She is a woman with a message. She keeps her audiences howling, with jokes that convey positive images about living happily together. Using comedy as a tool towards better understanding, Ms. Berry shows that by laughing with each other, people can learn to respect each other also.

Although she has always been funny, Ms. Berry didn't start performing until a few years ago when Mike Veneman, a comedian friend and classmate, convinced her to audition for amateur night at *Hilarities*, a comedy club in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. To her surprise, she won. She has been performing ever since.