Ebony Etchings, etc.

ENTERTAINMENT

"Release date set for Fred Williamson's latest flick....."

Back in the month of August of '95, Len White, president of Orion Pictures, announced the company was renewing efforts to produce its first feature film since emerging from bankruptcy, and that their first feature production would be a film bringing back top stars of the early '70s blaxploitation films.

A deal was then struck to have Fred Williamson play the starring role and also produce the film through Hammertime Productions, the independent production company owned by Williamson and his wife Linda. Larry Cohen whose production fame dates back to "Hell Up In Harlem" was also brought in to helm the production that was based on a script written by Kim Rattan.

The film's story concerns a group of former gang members who reunite to take on a group of drug-dealing gangbangers and clean up the old neighborhood. The old gang is comprised of former blaxploitation stars of the '70s, hence the title of the film "Original Gangsters." The co-starring cast brings together an awesome combination of acting talents for this production. Jim Brown ("Slaughter"), Pam Grier ("Foxy Brown"), Richard Roundtree ("Shaft"), Ron O'Neal (Superfly), Paul Winfield ("Gordon's War") and Isabel Sanford from the popular television series "The Jeffersons," plus others.

The drug-dealing gangbangers in this action packed film are portrayed by today's genre of popular rappers in the persons of Ice Tea, Drew Down, The Luniz's, Bushwick Bill and Shaeim. This talent pairing brings the old school of box office attractions together with the new school of today's recording stars.

Even though the picture may have somewhat of a new twist from the story line and techniques of pictures produced during the 'black renaissance' era of films, "the market has always been there for the black hero," states Williamson. "Look at the gate receipts produced by various black pictures playing in theatres today!"

Relative to the term 'blaxploitation' used in association with motion pictures featuring black actors and actresses, as was the case years ago, the new terminology, according to Orion's President Len White, is now 'urban adventure films.'

At the time of the original production announcement Issac Hayes was listed as producer for the soundtrack score. This has since changed. The completed soundtrack is comprised of songs from the '70s by such groups as The Dells, The Chi-lites and other popular recording groups from that musical era.

The original deal was structured whereby Orion holds the North American rights for Fred's new film, and foreign rights have been sold through Big Bear Releasing.

The completed production is now in the can and the date of April 26th has been set as the national release date for Fred Williamson's newest film "Original Gangsters" to hit theatres all over the country.

Plans are also underway to stage a Benefit Premiere Showing of the feature film in Gary, Indiana, where the picture was shot. Several noteworthy charities in Gary will benefit from the planned Benefit Premiere of Fred Williamson's "Original Gangsters."

"Tinseltown Topics....."

Nothing but rave reviews coming out of Nu Yawk behind Melba Moore's return to Broadway playing poor, but put-upon Fantine in "Les Miserables," who belts out "I Dreamed a Dream" — then dies on stage. Currently, Melba is slated for a three month portrayal of the role which started January 9th.

Legendary writer/producer and recording artist Leon Haywood has resurfaced in the music industry with a chart riding release titled "The Legend."

Speaking of legends, Rudy Ray Moore, who introduced the world to his Dolomite character via his hot selling X-rated albums back in the '60s, has an awful lot going for himself here of late. He's being touted as the 'Godfather of Rappers' by quite a few of today's rappers who also used his material in their recordings, he's shot a couple of television commercials for consumer products and he's working regularly with Wild Man Steve and Aunt Esther in a hilarious night club revue that's drawing rave reviews. Rudy also inked a recording contract with Capitol Records and he's currently in the process of gathering new materials for his debut release on the label.

With the success of her long running 'hit' play "Young Man, Older Woman" behind her, Millie Jackson has gotten her new production together and is about to take it on the road! Her new stage production is a theatre/concert piece being billed as "T.C.B." Translated it means "Taking Care of Bitchness" and those familiar with Millie know that she is more than qualified to deal with this subject. Her new stage production is scheduled to hit the road in early March.

The word from Dallas following David E. Talbert's new play "He Say...She Say...But What Does God Say?" that opened there January 9th to rave reviews and SRO audiences, is that it's definitely a 'hit'! This is the same stage production in which gospel singing sensation Kirk Franklin and The Family make their acting debut ably supported by a principle cast comprised of BerNadette Stanis from "Good Times," Ernest Thomas from "What's Happening", together with popular recording artist and actress Cheryl "Pepsii" Riley and a great supporting cast. The week-long engagement in Dallas launched the play's national tour. Beginning January 24th, and inspite of the predicted snow storms Kirk Franklin, The Family and the entire cast of 'He Say...She Say' will move into Detroit's Music Hall for a two-week performance engagement before moving on to the east coast for a one week engagement at Newark, New Jersey's Symphony Hall... and that's Hollywood this time! Until the next time, Lanier.

Twist of 8 Play Festival bows at UNLV January 31

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas launches "Twist of 8" a Ten-Minute Play Festival that opens January 31, 1996, in the Black Box Theatre on campus.

Performances will be at 8 p.m., January 31, February 1, 2 and 3, and 2 p.m. February 4. Tickets are $5 and on sale now at the Performing Arts Center box office on campus.

The eight plays featured in the festival will later be showcased at the Odyssey Theatre in Los Angeles opening on February 14. Performances will be at 8 p.m. February 14, 15, 16, 17 and 2 p.m. on February 18.

"It's an incredibly theatrical experience! Six actors playing 20 roles in eight plays, moving all the furniture, while ranging an emotional gamut from despair to exuberance," said director Jan Lewis, who has worked professionally in theater since 1981. Lewis is the director of literary programs for the Odyssey Theatre Ensemble in Los Angeles.

The plays in the festival include "Beer Chaser" and "Steep 10 Minutes" by Jennifer M. Ell, "Shooting Stick" by Gregory M. Vovos, "Waxed Fruit" by Anthony Del Valle, "Duck Crossings" by Joseph Zeccola, "Traction" by Erik Ramsey, "Prodigals" by Cheryldee Huddleston, and "No Sanctuary" by Jenny Laird.

Julie Jensen, head of the UNLV playwriting program, pays tribute for the idea of such a festival of short plays to the Actors Theatre of Louisville a decade ago. It became an annual event in Louisville. Last spring, UNLV produced "Menage a Ten," a festival of short plays, and decided to try the format again and showcase it in the Los Angeles area to give the university, the playwrights and the performers greater exposure.

Del Valle, a New York City native and professional journalist, is a former editor of the European Stars and Stripes, Germany. Jennifer M. Ell from Sioux Falls, SD, had a play produced at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington — "Go Fish, Mabel." Cheryldee Huddleston, who lives in the San Francisco Bay area, attended UCLA and studied screenwriting. Jenny Laird, who has a degree in psychology from the University of Virginia, has had several plays produced through UNLV. Erik Ramsey holds a degree in literature from the University of Wyoming and in 1994 received the Kennedy Center National Playwriting Award; his play "Acetylene" was produced by the John F. Kennedy Center, Washington. Gregory M. Vovos holds a degree in English from Ohio State University and is currently in the playwriting program at UNLV. Joseph Zeccola, who holds a degree in film studies, premiered his play "Horizons" last fall at UNLV.

For further information on "Twist of 8," please call the UNLV Performing Arts Center at 895-3535.

UNLV Launches Playwriting Contest

LAS VEGAS — The University of Nevada, Las Vegas is launching a playwriting contest in conjunction with its Senior Adult Theatre division, it was announced recently by Dr. Jeffrey Koep, dean of the College of Fine and Performing Arts, and Dr. Ann McDonough, director of Senior Adult Theatre, UNLV Department of Theatre Arts.

The contest is sponsored by the Dramatic Publishing Company, who will present a $1,000 prize to the winning playwright. In addition, the winner will have their play read at the National Senior Adult Theatre Festival held at UNLV January 5-9, 1997.

The play — which must be based on themes that reflect older adults in America today — should be full-length, non-musical, and in English.

"We are very excited at the prospect of fostering the development of new plays for senior adult theatre," said Dr. McDonough. "I applaud Dramatic Publishing Company for their vision in sponsoring the contest."

Dr. McDonough will coordinate the contest with Dramatic Publishing Company.

Interested playwrights should send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with a written request for an official rule and entry blank to: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Theatre Arts, Senior Theatre/Dramatic Publishing Playwriting Contest, 4505 S. Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, NV 89154-5036.

For more information, please call the UNLV Performing Arts Center, at 895-3535.