

ENTERTAINMENT



Courtney B. Vance, left, stars as Rev. Henry Biggs and Whitney Houston, right, stars as his gospel singing wife Julia.
Photo by David Lee

Houston's joyful praises carry film

By Coyne Steven Sanders
Special to the Sentinel-Voice

Music and motion picture superstar Whitney Houston is one on the world's great talents, loved by millions on every part of the globe. Touchstone Pictures' heartwarming comedy "The Preacher's Wife" showcases her extraordinary skills as an actress and singer. This uplifting, family-oriented film reveals the true essence of Whitney Houston—caring, involved, committed and, above all, deeply spiritual.

In director Penny Marshall's "The Preacher's Wife," Whitney stars as the talented and devoted wife of Reverend Henry Biggs (Courtney B. Vance), a good man who is doubting his ability to make a difference in his troubled community and home. Help is on the way in the form of angel Dudley (Denzel Washington) who soon becomes both the source of and solution to their problems.

For Whitney, making this movie remains a "magical" experience. "We were all affected spiritually by this film," Whitney says. "When you deal with the Spirit of God, you're truly calling upon it to enter you and it touches

everyone. When we were doing the church scenes and we were singing, The Holy Spirit came down and took over. I saw people crying, people were inspired who might not normally be moved. But the Spirit has a way of moving and arousing everyone. You cry, and you shout and give thanks."

Houston made a daring, original decision of her own, when she chose to record her vocal tracks live with the Georgia Mass Choir—instead of relying upon the traditional lip-synching to pre-recorded playback vocal tracks. For Houston, the experience of singing with the choir was particularly gratifying. During pre-production, she traveled to Atlanta to rehearse with the choir director, Reverend Biggiam. While she recorded the songs there, she simply laid down her voice on a track as a guide so that during filming she would be able to sing live. The result was a musical performance unusual for films—a performance charged with all the emotion and urgency of a live Whitney Houston concert—but backed with the Georgia Mass Choir, and among them, Whitney's real-life mother, legendary gospel singer Cissy Houston, who plays the part of a choir member in the film.

As always, Houston's musical instincts were
(See Houston, Page 16)

Washington's guiding hand helps "The Preacher's Wife"

By Coyne Steven Sanders
Special to the Sentinel-Voice

"People have always told me that I was a closet comedian," laughs Academy Award winning superstar Denzel Washington. "Most of the roles I've played have been heavy and serious, so it was good therapy—and a lot of fun—to do 'The Preacher's Wife,'" which opens nationwide December 20.

It was in fact Denzel Washington who, from the start, championed Touchstone Pictures' "The Preacher's Wife." "The evolution of this film started about two or three years ago," Washington says. "We talked with different writers and discussed different versions of the script. The film really came together when I talked to Penny Marshall about directing it, and talked to Whitney Houston about starring in it. Fortunately, Penny and Whitney were equally enthusiastic."

"The Preacher's Wife" shows an unexpected, delightfully comedic side to Denzel Washington, which he says is a departure from "serious, heavy roles"—such as last year's hit films "Crimson Tide," "Devil in a Blue Dress" and "Virtuosity," and most recently "Courage Under Fire."

A native of Mt. Vernon, New York, Washington attended Fordham University intending to pursue a career in medicine. Then he became interested in theater. After studying for a year at San Francisco's prestigious American Conservatory Theatre, he returned to New York where he began working with Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival as well as appearing in several off-Broadway productions, including the Negro Ensemble Company's production of "A Soldier's Play," for which he won an Obie Award.

In 1979, he appeared in the television film "Flesh and Blood," made his feature film debut in "Carbon Copy," and starred as Dr. Phillip Chandler in the NBC-TV series "St. Elsewhere." Other television credits followed, including "The George McKenna Story," "License to Kill," and "Wilma."

Then, in 1982, Washington recreated his role from "A Soldier's Play" in Norman Jewison's feature film "A Soldier's Story." He then starred in Sidney Lumet's "Power," Richard Attenborough's "Cry, Freedom" (for which he received his first Oscar



Washington as the angel Dudley

nomination), "For Queen and Country," "The Mighty Quinn," "Heart Condition," "Glory," for which he won the Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor, and Spike Lee's "Mo' Better Blues." In 1992, he starred again for Spike Lee in the epic biographical film "Malcolm X," winning an Academy Award nomination as Best Actor, a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor, the Berlin Film Festival's Award for Best Actor, and the NAACP Image Award for Best Actor.

Washington's other films are "Ricochet," "Mississippi Masala" (winning him a second NAACP Image Award as Best Actor), Kenneth Branagh's "Much Ado About Nothing," Jonathan Demme's "Philadelphia" and "The Pelican Brief." He received a third NAACP Image Award portraying the role of Lt. Commander Ron Hunter in the explosive drama "Crimson Tide."

"The Preacher's Wife" is concerned with fundamental things we've gotten away from in society—hope and faith in our fellow man and woman, and in God, and the sense of family and church as the foundation of a community," Washington says. "I like that, as well as the

(See Washington, Page 16)

BLACK TIE PROMOTIONS

presents

A New Year's Eve Party

featuring

Ace Recording Artist

★ BOBBY JONZ ★

Singing his new hit single
"I'm In The Mood"

Performing a special tribute to Brook Benton

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31st

St. Tropez Hotel (Monte Carlo Ballroom)

4555 E. Harmon Ave. (at Paradise)

Fun • Food • Noisemakers • Hats • Champagne

9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. — \$65 per person

Tickets available: Larry's Sight & Sound • 648-4444

Greer Entertainment • 893-9301



Slavery's past unburied

For centuries, slavery in the north was believed to be more benign than in the south. But now, after centuries of denial, science is discovering that slavery was an integral part of northern life. With the tools of archaeology, The New Explorers uncovers a chapter not found in New York's history books—the hidden world of the enslaved.

In 1991, New York City construction workers were digging a foundation for a skyscraper when they unearthed an 18th Century slave graveyard containing the remains of 427 bodies. It was a major news story—and a political fight—as African Americans in New York sought to preserve a sacred place. After months of negotiation, the skeletons were sent to Washington, D.C.'s Howard University for study. Today the results are in: enslaved Africans not only built early New York, they were literally worked to death.

Host Bill Kurtis and the Peabody Award-winning The New Explorer document the dig, the controversy, the research and the results. "Slavery's Buried Past" airs on PBS stations nationwide on Wednesday, Dec. 18 at 8 p.m. (check local listings). The New Explorers with Bill Kurtis is proudly sponsored by the United States Postal Service.

Moving south of the New York burial grounds, The New Explorers team joins historical archaeologists at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia

and the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's home in Nashville, Tennessee. Research is proving that despite the system of slavery designed to rob Africans of their identity and their rights, slaves held on to their traditions, practiced in secret.

Dr. Michael Blakey, a biological anthropologist at Howard University's Cobb Laboratory, heads the research on the skeletons found at the burial ground in New York City. Half of them were children, and many of those were infants under 6 months old. This evidence of high infant mortality tells researchers that the enslaved Africans at this site were kept in very, very poor conditions. Mark Mack and other scientists at Cobb Laboratory have been studying defects in muscle attachments and fractures on the remains of the buried slaves which show that people were "pressed to the very margins of human physical capacity."

In Williamsburg, Virginia, The New Explorer team examines the work of Maria Franklin, a historic archaeologist who excavated Richneck, a slave quarter dating back to the middle 1700s. She has found a collection of drilled spoon handles, artifacts she believes were worn to attract good spirits, indicating that the enslaved Africans incorporated ideas of the past in shaping their new identity in America. At the James River Archaeological Institute, also in Virginia, Garrett

(See Slavery, Page 16)