

ENTERTAINMENT

Audiences should like entering negotiations

By Tammy McMahan
Sentinel-Voice

What do you do if you're one of Chicago's top hostage negotiators and you're wrongfully accused of murder and embezzlement?

If you're Danny Roman, you take hostages.

Samuel L. Jackson, one of Hollywood's top actors, portrays Roman in "The Negotiator."

Jackson's character is a likable, gutsy Chicago police officer and hostage negotiator.

His world begins to crumble when his partner informs him that other officers in their own precinct are embezzling from the pension fund. Soon after this revelation, his partner is brutally murdered. He is falsely implicated in the murder and accused of taking the pension fund money.

His newlywed wife, portrayed by Regina Taylor, a star of the lauded "I'll Fly Away," stands by Jackson, who is emotionally picked apart by a plot, concocted by fellow officers, to frame him.

Roman is determined to



Special Sentinel-Voice photo by Sam Emerson

Samuel L. Jackson, left, portrays a cop on a mission to clear himself while holding J. T. Walsh hostage in the new Warner Bros. psychological drama, "The Negotiator."

find the truth behind the scheme and before he can be taken to jail, he storms into a 20-story Chicago skyscraper and takes the director of the police internal affairs department and his staff hostage.

He demands an outside negotiator from another Chicago police department to deal with him. Enter Chris Sabian (Kevin Spacey).

From this point, the story takes viewers on a journey toward the truth. The interaction between Roman and Sabian is fascinating with the cool, cerebral Sabian serving as the antithesis of the fiery, quick-witted and

emotional Roman. The players involved in the embezzlement and murder aren't revealed until the very end.

Director F. Gary Gray is sure to earn praise the \$50 million suspense thriller. Gray is steadily carving himself a niche in Hollywood.

After debuting with the Ice Cube-produced film "Friday," which he created on a shoestring \$2 million budget and turned into a hit and directing "Set It Off," New Line Cinema's highest grossing release of 1997—the movie grossed \$13 million in its opening weekend—Gray

is set to break the bank with the "The Negotiator."

The movie is helped by a talented supporting cast which includes Taylor; Ron Rifkin who plays Commander Frost and seems genuinely concerned about Roman; David Morse (SWAT commander Beck), whose take-no-prisoners attitude intensifies once Sabian and Roman join forces.

The late J.T. Walsh gives a wonderfully "smarmy" performance as the dour Inspector Neibaum, another of Roman's enemies. Paul Giamatti steals the show as one of Walsh's assistants and a wise-cracking former small-time crook.

Though Spacey's and Jackson's battle of wits and wills should have begun earlier—not 40 minutes into the film—the movie is successful. Viewers may also question why Roman, who represents the law, would break the law to prove his innocence.

Despite its few flaws, audiences will be happy they entered the negotiations

Play

(Continued from Page 10)

directed a religious play, but said he was drawn by the script.

"Theater has always been about helping and enhancing people's lives," he said. "If one person is touched and helped by this play, it's all worthwhile."

He said the script packs realism: the characters face difficult choices, and do not "live happily ever after. We don't always recognize the influence of evil; sometimes we think we're doing the right thing" when in fact we aren't, he said.

Butto had also never directed a theater musical. It was challenging, he said.

He particularly enjoyed the choir, led by the capable Dwana Broussard, and the musical selections which included traditional gospel songs and original pieces.

The Black Gospel Theater is a nonprofit organization and is West Las Vegas' oldest community theatre. Its founder, playwright Mary-Etta Sayles Clinton, tackles modern issues from a Christian perspective.

Since its inception, the theater has produced two plays per year. Members have performed on stage, in movies, on TV and in other community theaters.

The company has historically offered free tickets and benefit performances to other community organizations. Black History Month productions are free.

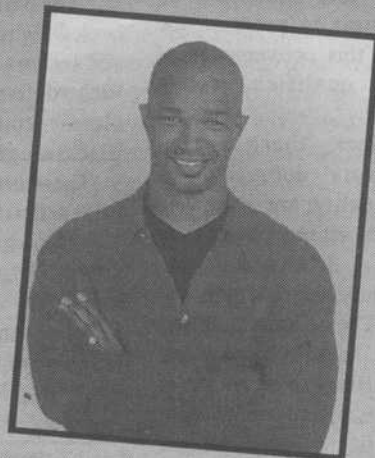
SAFE House is a nonprofit organization offering a comprehensive approach to domestic violence, including a 24-hour hotline, private and group family counseling, a state-accredited batterer's treatment program, parenting classes, advocacy, an emergency shelter for women and children, and other resources.

"Domestic violence is an ongoing and increasing problem facing families in our community," said associate director Karen Marconi. "SAFE House is committed to strengthening families by working to stop abuse in the family environment."

Proceeds from the benefit performance will help support the new shelter that SAFE House set up a year ago, increasing its emergency capacity from 12 beds to 54. Tickets for the first four performances are \$10 for adults and \$8 for seniors, children age 15 & under and active-duty military personnel. Admission to the Aug. 23 evening benefit performance is \$15.

Damon Wayans

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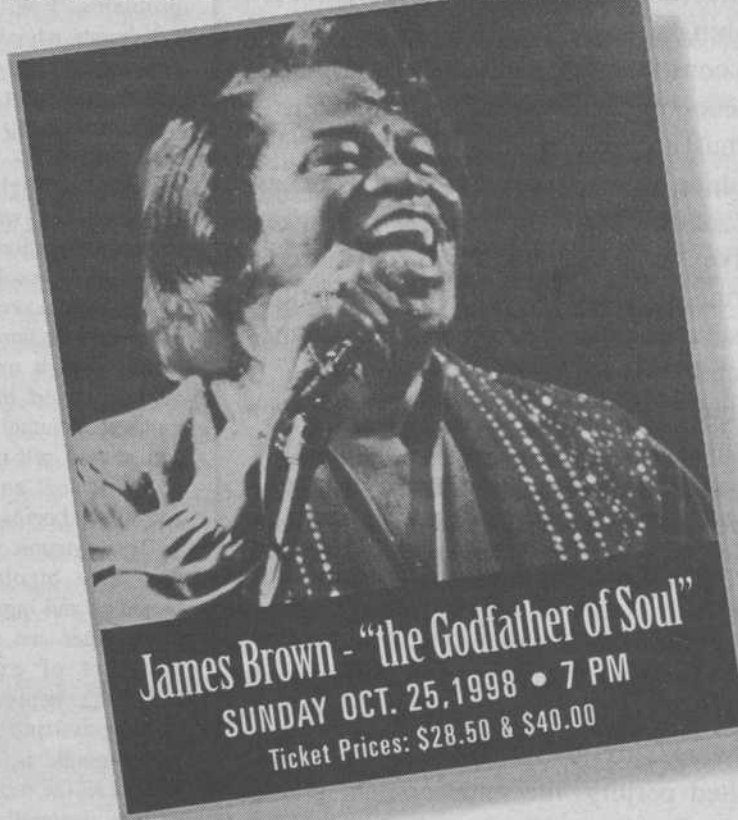
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