

ENTERTAINMENT

'Living Out Loud' offers fresh look at old themes

By Tammy McMahan
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Everyone wants to live out loud. Don't they? The film, *Living Out Loud*, answers with a resounding "yes," but it is not a "Hollywoodized" version of self-empowerment. *Living Out Loud* is an inspired, authentic work that shows that finding who you are and being who you are can be challenging, alienating, exhilarating and powerful.

Holly Hunter plays Judith, a newly divorced, sheltered woman whose cardiologist husband, portrayed by Martin Donovan, left her for a younger doctor. Although Judith still resides in a plush, New York City penthouse, her life is now filled with take-out dinners, revenge fantasies, suicidal thoughts, and martinis.

Then, she suddenly decides to go to a bar, Jasper's, to hear her favorite singer, Liz Bailey (Queen Latifah), croon about the blues. Here, she has a chance encounter with a handsome stranger (Elias Koteas) who awakens her to life. Judith is more open now. She strikes up an unlikely friendship with Pat (Danny DeVito), the elevator operator of her building. Pat is a tragic figure. His beloved teenage daughter has recently died.

Before that, his long-suffering wife threw him out of the house and her life due to his gambling problem. Pat is a man with "plans," but no follow-

through. Pat quickly falls in love with Judith. Judith is hungry for companionship, but not a romantic relationship with the very short, fat Pat. Judith returns to Jasper's to talk to her idol Liz who had previously snubbed her. Again, Judith strikes up an unlikely friendship with the sensual blues singer.

Although Queen Latifah's character is not given much screen time, her appearances add considerable spark, warmth and wit to the film. Latifah's Liz Bailey is a stunning, sultry blues singer who is aware of the blows that life can throw, but she lives as authentically as she can. She has a weakness for beautiful, sensitive men. Her current boyfriend is bi-sexual,



Photos special to Sentinel-Voice

Danny DeVito (right) and Holly Hunter star in New Line Cinema's adult comedy, *Living Out Loud*. (Below) Queen Latifah also stars in the new movie.



but she still wants him in her life as a kind of romantic partner.

Liz's figure and clothes show gentle self-confidence

and generosity, not arrogance and flamboyance. She inspires Hunter's Judith. Latifah's fascinating character definitely deserved

more screen time. Liz Bailey has had and is having an interesting journey regarding living out loud and I wanted to know more about that.

Holly Hunter gives a strong performance as the wounded, but not defeated Judith. She faces difficult issues such as why she settled for her wealthy, self-absorbed ex-husband, how she lost her identity, and the fact that life generally does not have "Hollywoodized" endings. Her character is refreshing. Judith is complex and flawed. She wants to improve herself, but she is initially afraid. She is shallow.

She is not sexually attracted to the squat, but hopelessly devoted Pat. Instead she longs for buff hunks like the masseur (Eddie Cibrian) she hires for a night. She is jealous of her snobby,

self-obsessed neighbors, but she is very much one of them. In a wonderfully acted scene, a chatty Judith asks Pat if he is a new employee and he hesitates and responds that he's been there for months. By the end of the film the audience knows that Judith's journey of self-discovery is far from over, but that's as it should be because life is a series of never-ending journeys.

Danny DeVito's portrayal of Pat is one of his strongest performances. He is tragic, warm and inspiring. Although for most of the film he is in denial about his gambling problem and his failed plans, he is determined to make something of his life.

Living Out Loud may inspire viewers to do the same, "live out loud."



VESTA WILLIAMS

Songstress' slim, trim, has got vim

Special to Sentinel-Voice

After five years out of the record industry spotlight, the flamboyant, rhythm and blues vocalist, Vesta Williams, has returned to the musical arena. This fall will bring her long-awaited fifth album, titled "Relationships."

The album which features 11 wonderful tracks has now graced record stores and is released on the upstart i.e. Music Label. Although i.e. Music is a part of the jazz heavy Verve Records family, the album is not a jazz album. "Relationships" is filled with the powerhouse one-of-a-kind music. Producers on the album include world-renowned jazz guitarist Lee Ritenour and Barry Eastmond.

The slim and trim Vesta, who made news with her phenomenal 100 pound weight loss a few years ago, puts it down real heavy on one of the album highlights - a remake of Stevie Wonder's classic "You and I."

How long did it take for Vesta to shed the weight? Twelve months. Her former dress size was 26 and is now a 7. The turning point for Vesta was that she lost her last recording contract, and the end of a romance.

Charles —

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"I've Got a Woman," with the release of his first album, "Ray Charles," in 1957.

A year later, he appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival and released what became his signature song, the very popular "What'd I Say."

But it was "Georgia on My Mind," the soulful Hoagy Carmichael tune that Charles recorded in 1960, that lured many whites and blacks to his music.

The tune won Charles two Grammy awards, for best vocal performance by a male and best performance by a pop artist.

Clearly, he had journeyed beyond rhythm 'n' blues and tapped into the mainstream.

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