

# Gospel play offers 'Thrill'

By Dianna Saffold  
Sentinel-Voice

Mother's Day, Sunday, May 13, was a beautiful day, the air was warm and sweet. The atmosphere was filled with an ambiance of mother love. It was a perfect day for the world premiere of the Sid Burston musical stage play, THRILL!

The Falconquest production was performed at the Cashman Center Theater. The steady flow of theatregoers nearly filled the main floor seating. Host, local radio personality Henry Black, led an opening prayer, leaving us with this thought, "God's love is so great, anyone of us can receive his anointment." That thought proved to be profoundly accurate once we discovered the saga of THRILL!

"Don't hate the player, hate the game," spoke the voice, and the show began. This production, written and directed by Sid Burston, brought forth an interesting concept: local crime lord becoming primary source of economic support for a church tired of begging their congregation to tithe. Thrill, their economic savior, wore the smile of contempt for street crimes such as drug trafficking and pimping, while engaging in "high-level economic crime."

Whatever high-level economic crime he engaged in, legalities- or should I say, the lack of- didn't seem to stop him from buying up all the banks in New York. Much to the delight of Reverend Miles- played by Ernest "Raj" Thomas of the popular hit sitcoms, "What's Happening" and "What's Happening Now"- the local gangster brought their church's asset value to \$30 million.

The gangster's headquarters is where the story began. It was here that we met Sid Burston as Thrill, and his street life-lovin' mistress, Champagne, the lovely Freda Payne, who, by the way, did

not sing a song. We were also introduced to his back-stabbing senior henchman, Chance, actor Barry Wiley, and a few of his crime soldiers, including Raheem Mitchell as Stutty Gray and Godfrey Davis as Tony. The set was large but adequate. On the other hand, the modern day costuming was great. From the many colorful suits worn by Chance to the skin, feathers and fur worn by Freda Payne.

Opening strongly, we knew the plot would take us to some sort of coup by Chance, and that Champagne's loyalty would be tested. During this scene there was dialogue about a nosey secretary- I am assuming the woman that entered at the end of this scene was that character.

The stage emptied, and Reverend Dr. Thomasina Oates stepped downstage and gave us a resounding version of "Jesus, Keep Me Near The Cross." The song was powerful- but it didn't have a thing to do with that scene.

The action went from the headquarters to the streets of New York. Here we learned Champagne would rather continue her days of crime than move into the legitimate world of banking with Thrill. Champagne, departing in a sassy huff, prompted Thrill's delivery of a moving monologue that drew applause from the audience. We also met a young lady who sat on the stage during this scene. Some interpreted her presence as waiting on a bus, since she did check her watch several times while sitting in front of a building- but I think she must have been some sort of angelic presence, one that delivered the song written by Sid and wife Betty Burston, "Which Way Should He Go." This song did relate to the scene and was delivered with a range driven by vocal power and abdominal strength by recording artist/actress

Maketta Birdsong. We were also introduced to the Reverend Miles, "Raj," and his cast of church folk. The good church folk were not always so good. Sister Arnelle, comedic thespian Yolanda McDowell, always had something not too nice to say about their financial savior, Thrill.

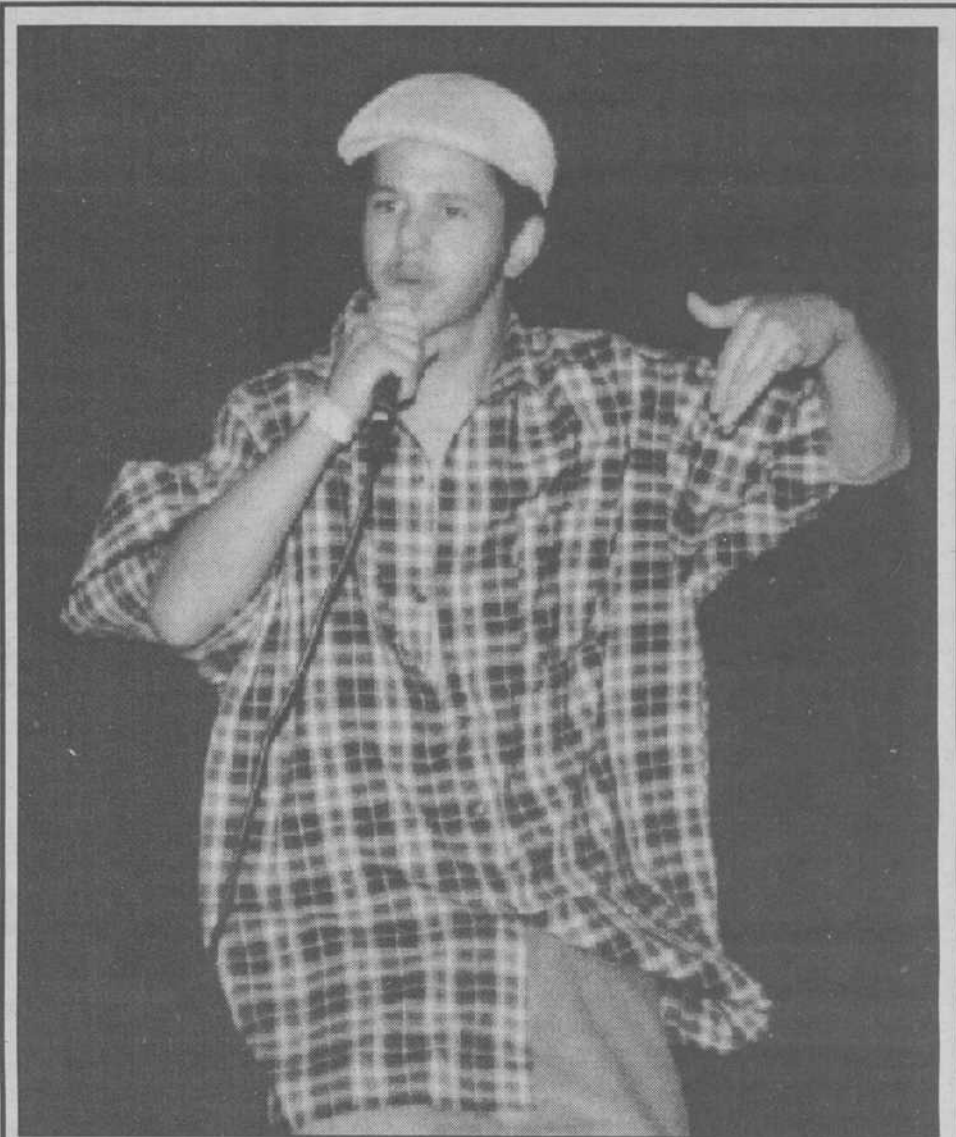
Taking plenty of criticism and personal attacks from fellow church member Reverend Lewis, actor H.D. Washington, McDowell's portrayal of a complaining, name-calling sister was well done. Though saturated with maybe a few too many fat jokes, the energy between the two was quick and funny.

The show moved right along, weaving in and out of the plot, dropping an emotion-stirring gospel song at the conclusion of each scene. The plot became pretty predictable after a while, including Thrill's return from the dead after being blown up during the restaurant scene.

We learned later he was gunned down, not blown up. The gunman, Chi-Town, was actor Leon Isaac Kennedy, known for writing and producing the movies, "Penitentiary," 1, 2 & 3. I guess the loud noise, flash of lights and smoke drifting to the stage was the result of the large caliber gun he used, not a bomb.

The plot thickened slightly when henchman Chance and gangstress Champagne visited the church in an attempt to extort the tithes and offering. During this church scene, Champagne was stabbed to death, Thrill returned from the dead, and it pretty much ended on a happy note.

The plot was just a little muddy, but the songs were strong and belted out just the way gospel lovers like it. With a little repair on the script and some slight changes regarding the music, Sid Burston should be well received for his latest piece, THRILL!



## HAZARDOUS TO OPPONENTS

Award winning hip hop artist H2O performed one of his songs during LVN Production's "Showcase of Talent" show at the Huntridge Theater earlier this month. Several singers, dancers and hip hop artist electrified the audience with their skills.

Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

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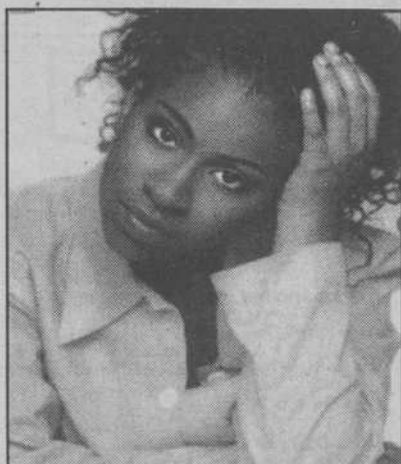
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