

Quality performances make 2004 Year of the Foxx

By Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Between the critical acclaim he's received in 2004 for, first, "Collateral" and, now, "Ray," Jamie Foxx looks like a shoo-in to land an Academy Award nomination come Oscar time. Who ever suspected that such heights were in store for Eric Bishop when he abandoned his hometown of Terrell, Texas and set out for Tinseltown in 1989?

In 1990, he parlayed his success as a stand-up comic into a stint on Fox-TV's "In Living Color." A half-dozen years later, he had his very own sitcom which then led to roles in feature films like "Boozy Call," "The Players Club," "Held Up," "Any Given Sunday," and "Bait."

Of course, it was his convincing impersonation of colorful cornerman Drew "Bundini" Brown in "Ali" that heralded his arrival as a tal-

ented character actor. But he even upped the ante with "Breakin' All the Rules," a romantic comedy where he proved himself as having the charm called upon to carry a picture as a leading man.

Finally, with "Ray," a biography of the recently-deceased Ray Charles, Jamie has been asked to handle the title role in a full-length feature. And he already has his next couple of flicks in production, namely, "Stealth" and "Jarhead," with both slated for release in 2005.

KW: How were you able to impersonate Ray Charles so convincingly, when he's such a familiar cultural icon?
JF: "It's called nuance. In order to get Ray Charles, you had to pray a little bit, because everybody knows who Ray Charles is. I mean young kids, hip-hop kids, seasoned people, I don't say old people, everybody."

KW: You even look like

him.
JF: "The first thing we did, I lost 30 pounds. I'd been walking around at 190, so with the help of my trainer, I actually changed my metabolism."

KW: But how were you able to transform your face?

JF: "Eddie Murphy said, 'You gonna do good because got that jaw like Ray Charles.' So, that was one of the things that worked in our favor. I said, 'Eddie, I don't know what that means, but I'm going to run with it.' And when I put the shades on, it all kind of came together. And then it was a matter of finding the nuance."

KW: How did you find it?

JF: "In things I observed when Ray and I met each other. When he was not 'on,' but just sitting there. How he ordered his food, how he talked to his kids, how he gets angry but internalized it. How he sits down and opens

legs, his down-home way of answering the phone. Once you get all that, you're not watching Ray Charles anymore, you're watching a blind man go through some things. A blind man blessed with talent. A blind man that's on a journey. But we needed all those different ingredients to really get this character down."

KW: What was it like spending time with Ray?

JF: "When I first met Ray, he said, 'Let me check these fingers out. Oh, you got stronger fingers, oh, yeah.' And then we sat down at dual pianos, he's playing one and

I'm playing the other and we're singing the blues. He said, 'If you can sing the blues, you can do anything.' Then he launched into some Thelonious Monk which for me was like the equivalent of flying off a mechanical bull. And when I couldn't follow him, he said, 'Why the hell did you do that?' and he wasn't laughing. 'The notes are right underneath your fingers,' he said. 'You just have to take the time to find them, young man.' He was so serious because his music was his harmony. If it's off, his whole life is off. So, I used that as a metaphor through

the whole movie. Seeing life as notes underneath our fingers. We just have to figure out which ones we want to play to leave our music. Right there, I decided that I was going to play the right Ray Charles notes to tell Ray Charles' story."

KW: Were you eventually able to get that Monk tune down he was doing?

JF: "Oh yeah, and after I finally mastered that riff, Ray went, 'There it is. That's what I'm talking about.' And he jumped up and slapped his thighs and said, 'The kid's got it,' and walked out. That's

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Reputation of humanitarian restored by new documentary

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

While America routinely pays tribute to some martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King, Freedom Riders Schwerner, Cheney and Goodman, and the four little girls who perished in the Birmingham church bombing, the country has not been as kind to the memory of Viola Liuzzo.

But this Detroit mother of five, who sacrificed her life in Selma, Alabama on March 25, 1965, deserves a celebrated place in the history books right alongside legendary figures like Rosa Parks and Medgar Evers.

For Liuzzo, the only White female to die for this cause during the desegregation era, was murdered in a drive-by shooting by a careful of cowardly Ku Klux Klansmen.

Inspired by a compulsion to fight injustice, she was in town to participate in a non-violent march lobbying for the African-American right to vote in a city where only 150 of 30,000 eligible Blacks had previously been allowed to register.

Though her death helped embarrass Congress into passing the Voters' Rights Act, the Liuzzo legacy has remained tainted, at least until now, by a malicious FBI smear campaign personally spearheaded by J. Edgar Hoover, an inveterate racist.

Among the lies deliberately spread to the press were allegations that Liuzzo was

a drug addict with needle marks in her arms who had only come to Alabama to mate indiscriminately with many Black men.

Finally, almost 40 years later, thanks to Home of the Brave, the record has been set straight.

This revealing documentary was directed by Paola di Florio who, with the assistance of some of Liuzzo's still-traumatized children, took advantage of the Freedom of Information Act to unearth evidence which establishes U.S. Government complicity not only in the woman's defamation but in her death itself.

From a file three times as thick as the one the Bureau kept on the Klan, they share plenty of proof that their mom had been targeted.

And we learn that an undercover FBI informant not only rode in the automobile with their mother's assassins, but might even have been the triggerman.

The picture deftly combines the kids' tearful, heartbreaking reminiscences with archival news footage and insightful interviews with Andrew Young, John Lewis and others who had been on hand in Selma.

In the end, Home of the Brave amounts to a fitting tribute to a true American hero betrayed by her country during one of its most shameful periods.

Excellent (4 stars), Unrated .

Keys to headline Barbados jazz fest

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados (AP) - Grammy winner Alicia Keys will headline the Barbados Jazz Festival in January.

The festival will be held Jan. 10-16, organizers announced this week.

Performers also will include Gato Barbieri, Yellow Jackets, Pieces of a Dream, Kaeko Matsui, Tito de Garcia and the Charles Flores Quintet featuring Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez and Giovanni Hidalgo.

Festival venues include the Garfield Sobers Gymnasium outside Bridgetown, the Colony Club Hotel on the west coast and the Farley Hill National Park in northern St. Peter, organizer Gilbert Rowe said on Sunday.



Stone

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"I share in the book that I was victim. And I thought that was very important to say and to explain how I come to understand what happened to me," she stated.

Stone, a former executive editor of Essence magazine and the founding editor in chief of essence.com, said that an estimated one and four women and one and six men are abused by the age of 18 — most often by someone they know. More importantly, Stone says, the history of slavery and stereotypes about Black sexuality also have

bearings on sexual abuse in the African families.

"When you put this in the context of slavery, people who did not for hundreds of years own their bodies, that has some connection to where we are today," Stone said. "Being raped by slavemasters, and both Black men and women forced to breed to produce more property can be traced back to our history."

For more information about Robin D. Stone's book, visit www.robinstone.com/

Antonio R. Harvey writes for the Sacramento Observer.

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