What's Happening

By Ida Peters

All this week hundreds of people have been previewing a new movie, "Johnny Tough." In the households of the people who have seen this film ... there is a whole lot of communicating going on. And ... mark my words ... by the end of this year ... and when awards time comes around ... you'll be talking about "Johnny Tough" and all the unknowns who will immediately become household words.

When I got invited to lunch with Renny he?" Then I went to see "Johnie Tough."

This is a story about a black family in the suburbs ... film was shot in the Wilshire District of Los Angeles. It just so happens that the actors are black ... but it could be about any middle class suburban family in America.

Renny Roker plays the father, Phil Banes. He is stepfather of a ten-year-old, Johnny Banes ... played by Dion Gossett ... Sandy Reed plays the mother, Denise Banes.

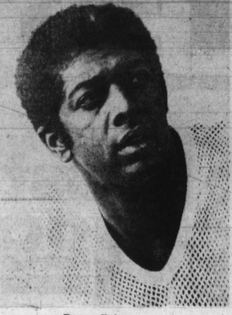
The father has a good insurance job and spends almost every night perfecting his bowling. His mother works but spends a lot of time trying for a movie career.

Their household is one of constant petty bickering ... and while they may live together the parents and child are not on same wave lengths or communicating.

• • •

Johnny is in an integrated elementary school with all of the normal problems and all of the normal things going for him or any child his age. The only difference being that Johnny is seeking, but receiving, the type of love, affection and direction from his busy parents that is necessary for Johnnp to go the route of a normal boy.

His white teacher ... we're not sure at this point whether he's bigoted, frustrated, or just doesn't give a damn ... has also given up on Johnny. Consequently, Johnny has to be extremely tough inside in order to exist in a world that's difficult enough for adults to live in. Johnny finds himself without this love, without this attention, without this direction from his family, and without the right type of attention from his teacher to help him overcome some of the normal problems any child would have. The outcome is frightening but, at the same time, very realistic.



Ronny Roker

RENNY ROKER

Who is Renny Roker?

Over the past seven years he has been in over 70 TV shows and for two seasons was a regular on "The Gomer Pyle Show." Then, you've seen him on "Ironsides," Mod Spuad" "The FBI," "Cannon," just to name a few.

You've also seen him recently in "Melinda" and "Tick, Tick, Tick".

He's not tall ... but his 200 pounds are well put together. He's a Virgo ... just 31 ... and single at this time ... and plays tennis to keep in shape.

The woman he'll fall for will "not mistake kindness for weakness."

Renny tells us he was Renald Roker, the son of the Reginald Rokers ... of New York where his mother is a nurse and his father a postal worker. He has one brother, Wally in the record business ... Wally Roker Management; a sister, Miram Horsford, professor of Nursing, Brooklyn Hospital and another sister, Denise, with the N.Y. Board of Education.

He attended high school in St. Croix in the Virgin Islands and attended the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico with a major in speech and drama.

Renny then worked for Nat King Cole, handling promotion and then with Liberty Records ... before going into movie and TV work.

Renny also tells us that "Johnny Tough" is a "G" rated film, made for the entire family and is produced, written and directed by a black man, Horace Jackson ... and financed by black money.

Jackson is only 31 and originally hails from Philly. "Johnny Tough" was made two years ago on a low budget under $100,000 and was shot in eight weeks.

Dion Gossett who plays Johnny and the other children in the cast were found in the LA schools. But young Chris, Christopher Towns, the class clown who gives a hilarious performance is a Detroit native who just happened to be visiting California. Renny says he didn't even pick up his last week's pay and they haven't seen him since.

"Johnny Tough" is breaking records in Chicago and New York and opens here next week.

Young people leaving the previews were heard to say ... "I wish my parents could see this."

Most adults at our preview said the pix made them take a hard look at their relationships with their children.

Many teachers seeing the film in New York and Chicago are reporting that they are taking a harder look at themselves and reevaluating the harm they may be doing to their young charges.

Well, what do you do with a child who turns the exercise lesson commands into the "funky chicken" or turns the Preamble to the Constitution into "street talk?"

MORE NEW MOVIES

Movies are better than ever — for black involvement. Just to name a few coming this fall ... "The Wilby Conspiracy," UA release, with Sidney Poitier; "The Klansman," Paramount Pictures, with O. J. Simpson, Lola Falana and Jeanie Bell.

In production or near completion: "Funny Lady," Columbia, Ben Vereen "Tommy," Columbia, Tina Turner; "The Pond," Walt Disney, Moses Gunn; "Framed," Paramount, Brock Peters "The Towering Inferno," 20th Century-Fox, O. J. Simpson; "Report to the Commissioner," United Artists, Yaphet Kotto; "Hey, Good Lookin'," Warner Bros., Charles Gordone; "It's Time To Laugh," SRG International, Marc Copage; "Thunder McCoy," Omni Pictures, screenplay by Warren Hamilton Jr.; "The Kirlian Force," Mars Productions, Della Reese; "Boss Nigger," 3-P Enterprises-Bryanston, Fred Williamson; "Mahogany," Motown, Diana Ross, Billy Dee Williams; "The Bingo Long Travelling All-Stars and Motor Kings," Universal, Billy Dee Williams.

Music Notes

JAZZ

Herbie Mann and The Family of Mann with David Newman appear Saturday, August 10, 8:30 p.m. at the Merriweather Post Pavilion, Columbia, Md.

• • •

BIG BAND

Baltimore's Big Band conducted by Gene Walker in War Memorial Plaza Sunday, August 11, 7 to 9 p.m.

The Big Band Sound popularized by Count Basie and Stan Kenton will be featured. In addition, modern jazz and selections of contemporary music with a rock beat by Thad Jones and Mel Lewis will be offered.

Guest soloist is Luella Bright who will offer a variety of popular jazz ballads including "God Bless the Child," "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" and "My Man."

In addition to the Sunday series in War Memorial Plaza which will extend until August 25, the program will be offered daily next week from 8 to 10 p.m. at the following locations:

Monday, August 12, Cedonia Mall, 6000 Radecke Ave.

Tuesday, August 13, St. Jerome's Church, Scott and Hamburg Sts.

Wednesday, August 14, Reisterstown Road Plaza, 6500 Reisterstown Rd.

Thursday, August 15, Mt. Vernon Place;

Friday, August 16, Village of Cross Keys, 5100 Falls Road.

POP CONCERT

Students of James Hollman will present a free outdoor concert Wednesday, August 14, at 8:30 p.m. in the parking lot of the Pratt library's Broadway branch, Broadway and Orleans Street.

The program will feature popular music, rock-and-roll and jazz compositions.

SOUL FESTIVAL.

This summer's edition of The Soul Festival will take place August 17 and 18, noon to 10 p.m. in Hopkins Plaza.

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The McKenzie report

By Vashti McKenzie

The McKenzie Report

The last two times I sat in the first seat of the front row at Painters Mill Music Fair, comedian Joan Rivers escorted me to my seat after a conversation on natural child birth ..... Ann Corio, the queen of burlesque, showed me her goodies.

This time, I got to hold Liberace's balls.

I mean the silver ones studded with all kinds of jewels and sparkles hanging off a silver rope belt. That's the belt attached to the layered silver gaucho pants.

Those are the gaucho pants on top of the white ruffled lace sequined pantaloons. Those are the panties that tickled the top of the silver leather boots with the rhinestones heel and toe.

And that's just half of it.

I got to touch his diamond-covered grand piano watch that complemented his black stoned (Onyx?) and diamond grand piano ring that looked dull next to his "left over" massive diamond fore finger ring.

That was after I had to shade my eyes against the white glitter-glare of his magnificent floor length cape over the bolero-vested gaucho pant suit.

If you've got it... fla unt it!

Liberace

That's the suit made especially for Liberace's third command performance before the Queen of England. He's only worn it twice.

"The Queen Mother just loved it," he said.

So, all you dudes who think you're a bad "Super Fly" dresser with your pink velvet suit to match your pink coat matching your pink custom chrome infested Cadillac ..... Think again.

If you haven't seen Liberace, the talented pianist famous for his collection of pianos, clothes and candelabras, you ain't seen nothing yet!!

Liberace is the world's first Suptr Fly. He's got more class and talent and he's "Mr. Showmanship."

Liberace opened this week at Painters Mill and will be performing nightly thru Sunday. 13-year-old Scotty Plummer, a banjo player par excellence and Lee's protegy share the entertainment bill along with ventriloquist Russ Lewis.

The world is just catching up to Liberace actually.

The glitter rock set of Dr. John, Margolis Magnolias, the New York Dolls, Sly Stone and more are gracing this country's stages in wild costumes of rhinestones, sequins, feathers and satins.

Liberace's been doing it for the last twenty years.

You may t...nk ... y people who appreciate the flamboyant costumes and antics of Liberace are the little old "shopping baggers" who watch "The Mike Douglass Show" every morning religiously.

Wrong!

There were many sophisticated ladies there wearing Gucci shoes, Halston suits and Tiffany diamond rings.

I was surprised at the number of young people present who hung on every Liberace witticism and every note from the keyboard. They were the first to run anxiously to the circular stage clicking their instamatic flash cameras of the star.

Liberace definitely knows how to please his audience. He played waltz music, popular tunes, Barbra Streisand's "The Way We Were" something from the 1920's and the 1940's. Without prompting, the audience started to sing along.

"Mitch Miller would be proud," he said.

His grand piano is decorated with a candelabra of course and a clear plastic top. The piano bench is covered with white fur.

"It's white virgin mink," he said. "It's the only thing I sit on."

Variety is the spice of life and Liberace gives you the works. He wore a black jeweled tuxedo with diamond buttons spelling out his name.

"Look closely, it's hard to read the letters when they're diamond on diamond," he said.

Liberace joined the "jean machine." He wore a pale blue denim jump suit with a short cape studded with multi-colored rhinestones in various star shapes. He looked like he was right out the pages of a Captain America comic book.

"It's hotter than hell, up here," he said. "I should put on my hot pants."

The audience roared and he said "Don't encourage me."

As if he needed any.

For his final, the lights dimmed and Liberace came on stage in his white glitter hot pants drum major outfit. The lights on his high plumed hat flashed as he marched around the stage twirling a silver baton.

Enough is not enough. As he made his final bow to the standing ovation of the capacity crowd, the whole suit lit up in a blaze of colors blinking like a marquee on the Las Vegas strip.

The man is absolutely bananas.

The Staple Singers, "Pop" Staples, Mavis, Cleo and Yvonne perform nightly thru Sunday, August 11, 8:30 p.m. at Carter Barron Amphitheatre in D.C.

TV Notes

By C. Stevenson

Florida sets out to prove she's the best housekeeper in the project, and also that winning the "Best-Kept-Apartment" contest is not dependent on whom you know on "Good Times," Friday, Aug. 9.

• • •

Soulful pop singer Lou Rawls pays a visit to Johnny Mann and the Singers on Friday, August 9.

During the program, Rawls vocalizes "Walk On In" and "A Man of Value."

• • •

Kate Jackson, Katharine Justice and Kathleen Nolan star in "Limbo," a film dramatizing the plight of three wives left at home while their husbands fight in Vietnam, Aug. 9.

• • •

From the sun-kissed beach at Malibu to the yesteryears of a major motion picture studio backlot, Desi Arnaz Jr. will present to viewers some of the attractions of Southern California on "Desi Arnaz Jr.: California My Way." a "Wide World Special" Friday, August 9.

Billy Preston and Flash Cadillac and the Continental Kids will be guests on "American Bandstand," Saturday, Aug. 10.

• • •

The single parent is more common today than ever before, and "Women Now' will be devoted to that subject on Saturday, August 10.

Edie Daly, moderator, welcomes Cliff Patterson, president of Parents Without Partners, to discuss the difficulties and frustrations confronting the single parent.

Smokey Robinson

On Sunday, August 11 "Evening at Pops" brings a night of all Gershwin hits with Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops Orchestra. Pianist Earl Wild is featured playing Gershwin's Concerto in F.

The Pops Orchestra play from Girl Crazy — "I Got Rhythm," "Embraceable You," 'bidin' My Time;" Gershwins Cuban Overture, "Strike Up the Band" and "Wintergreer for President."

• • •

Host Peter Marshall welcomes singer Gladys Knight for her first appearance on "The Hollywood Squares" Monday through Friday, Aug. 12-16.

Don Cornelius, executive producer and host of Soul Train, will bring the "Best of Soul Train" to television viewers this weekend in major cities across the nation.

The talent he has lined up for this extra special show reads like a "Who's Who" from the musical world of Pop and R and B. An added feature will be a cameo appearance by the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, founder and president of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity).

Featured guest entertainers and the songs they will sing include B B. King, "I Love to Life the Life I live;" the Staple Singers, "Come Go With Me;" Smokey Robinson, "Sweet Harmony;" Tower of Power, "This Time It's Real;" Marvin Gaye, "Distant Lover;" Sly and the Family Stone, "I Want to Take You Higher;" the Jackson 5, "Dancing Machine;" Johnny Mathis, "Foolish; Gladys Knight and the Pips, "On and On; Al Green, "Here I Am and the OJays sing "Love Train."

Rev. Jesse Jackson

BSO

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's Saturday "Pops" concerts for this fall will feature Ethel Ennis, Count Basie, Phyllis Diller at the piano Arthur Fiedler and the George Shearing Quintet.

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