CELEBRITY LOOKOUT

By JASON:

James Van DerZee

Q: A friend of mine collects old films. One of my favorites is "Porgy and Bess," with Sidney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge. Isn't it true that a black man, Dubois, wrote the story?

B. J. Brown
New York, N.Y.

A: Porgy, Bess and Sportin' Life, Catfish Row's romantic triangle, first appeared in a novel by DuBose Heyward, *Porgy* - (1925).

Heyward, a white man who wrote about black life around Charleston, S.C., and his wife adapted the novel for the stage. Later, George Gershwin used the folk tale as the basis for his opera, "Porgy and Bess," which was a critical and financial disaster when it opened in 1935. The composer did not live to see the work redeem itself.

Heyward, along with the other Gershwin, George's brother Ira, collaborated on the immortal songs of the opera including "Summertime," "I Loves You, Porgy" and "It Ain't Necessarily So."

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Q: About five years ago, I purchased a hardback collection of photos by James Van DerZee from a sale bin in a drugstore for $5. Recently, I read that Mr. Van DerZee's works will be exhibited here. Is he still alive? And could my book be a collector's item?

H. Nelson
Chicago, Ill.

A: Van DerZee is very much alive and well and living in New York City.

At 94 years of age, he recently ended a twelve year retirement to begin taking pictures again. He photographed the front cover of Lou Rawls' latest LP, "Blue Lou," and appears with the singer on the back.

Van DerZee is the most prolific and celebrated photographer of black life in Harlem from the Harlem Renaissance in the '20s through the late '60s. A resurgence of interest in his work may help introduce him to a whole other generation. Yes, I would think that your book is a collector's item. Hold on to it.

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Q: Is James Mtume of the rock group Mtume the same as the percussionist who appears as a side man on Sonny Rollins' recordings?

C. Holly
Phila., Pa.

A: Yes. James Mtume is the son of saxophonist Jimmy Heath and nephew of bass player Percy Heath. He recorded with Sonny Rollins during the late Sixties and early Seventies. He was also percussionist with the last Miles Davis band before the trumpet player retired.

Recently, Mtume and fellow Davis alumnus Reggie Lucas are partners in Mtume-Lucas productions. They wrote and produced Stephanie Mills LPs "What Are You Going To Do?" and "Sweet Sensation," in addition to LPs by Phyllis Hyman and Gary Bartz.

Mtume and Lucas's biggest hit singles for other artists have included the Roberta Flack-Donny Hathaway hits "The Closer I Get To You" and "Back Together Again."

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Q: I read that Wilt Chamberlain recently settled the controversy about his height. That he's really two inches shorter at 7 feet even than he's rumored to be. Who is the shortest man ever to play pro basketball?

D. Williams
Baltimore, Md.

A: The shortest man presently playing pro basketball is probably Charlie Criss, a 5' 7" guard with the Atlanta Hawks.

Criss is a player of phenomenal strength and agility, has developed his own bag of tricks to get around the big guys.

Before Criss, 5' 6" Monte Towe was signed by the Denver Nuggets, but rarely played during the two years ('75-'77) he stayed on the team.

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Q: A while ago, I saw Frankie Crocker, the New York disc jockey, emcee a show with Ashford and Simpson and Grace Jones. He was more flamboyant and well-dressed than the stars.

Z. Hamill
New York, N.Y.

A: On stage and on the air, Crocker enjoys the *show*end of his business as much as the stars he introduces and, yes, helps to make.

As program director of stations WBLS-FM in New York and KUTE in Los Angeles, two of the largest black stations in the country, he has helped to sell enough records to collect a few gold discs himself.

At a salary said to be about $200,000 per year plus bonuses, he is well paid for his skills, and can afford to be flamboyant.

Dorothy Dandridge

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Q: Who is the teenager they're calling the female Bobby Fischer?

N. Dennis
Charleston, S.C.

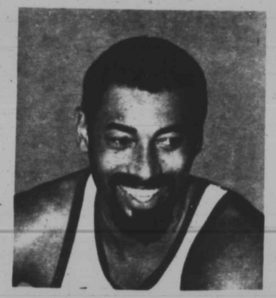
A: You refer to 15-year-old Baraka Shabazz, the young chess wiz who is ranked No. 6 among American women chess players.

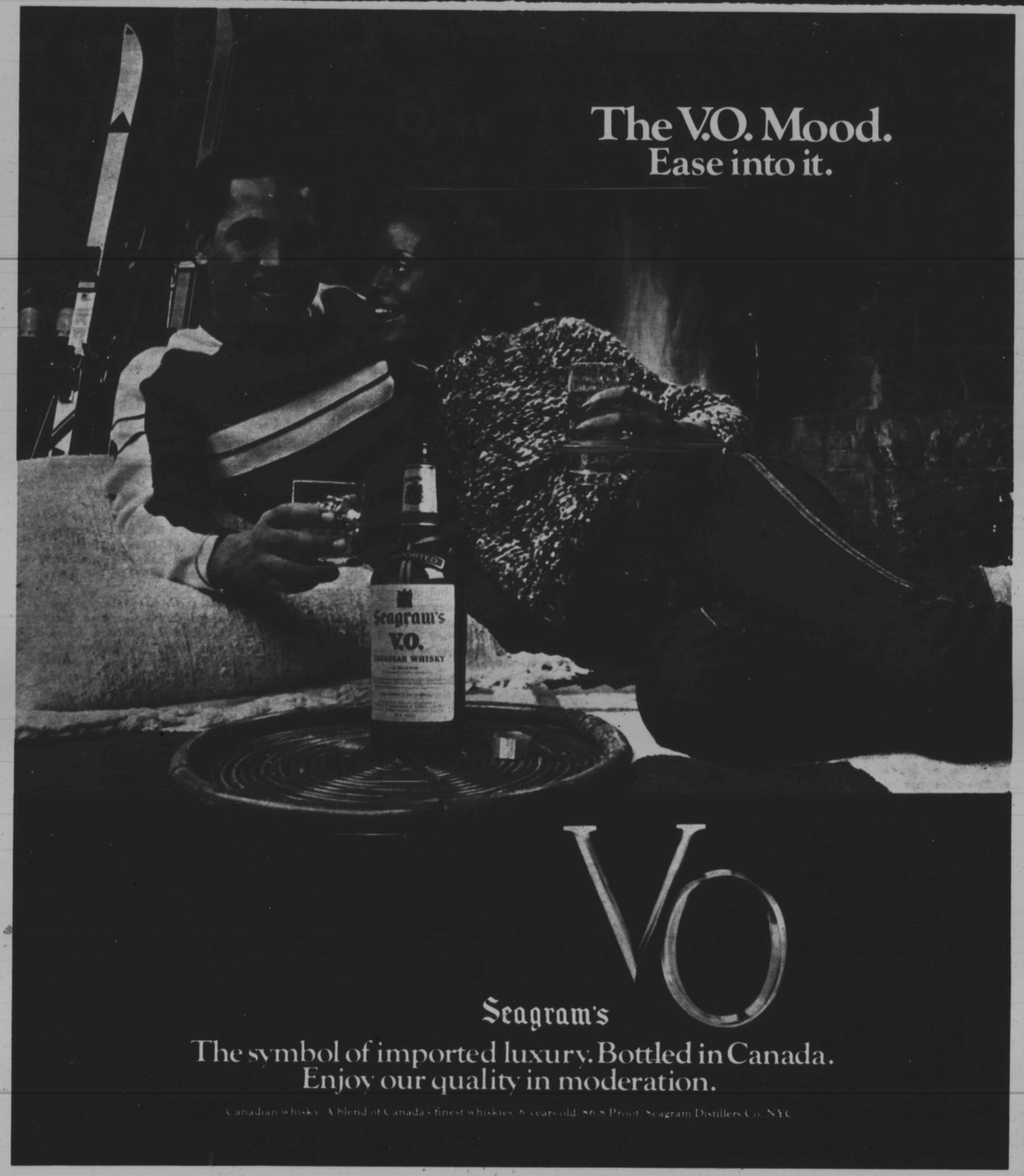
Baraka, who lives with her parents in Oakland, Calif., says her goal is to become this country's first female International Grand Master by the time she's 18.

She is not to be taken lightly. Experts interviewed by a popular magazine predict that Baraka could attain Master status this year, making her one of 500 or so U.S. Masters and only the second female.

If she does, incidentally, she will have done in three years what it took Fischer five years to do.

Sonny Rollins



Wilt Chamberlain

All letters should be addressed to Jason, DAWN Magazine, 628 N. Eutaw St., Baltimore, Md. 21201. All questions are welcome, but while Jason cannot provide individual answers, questions of general interest will be used in this column.