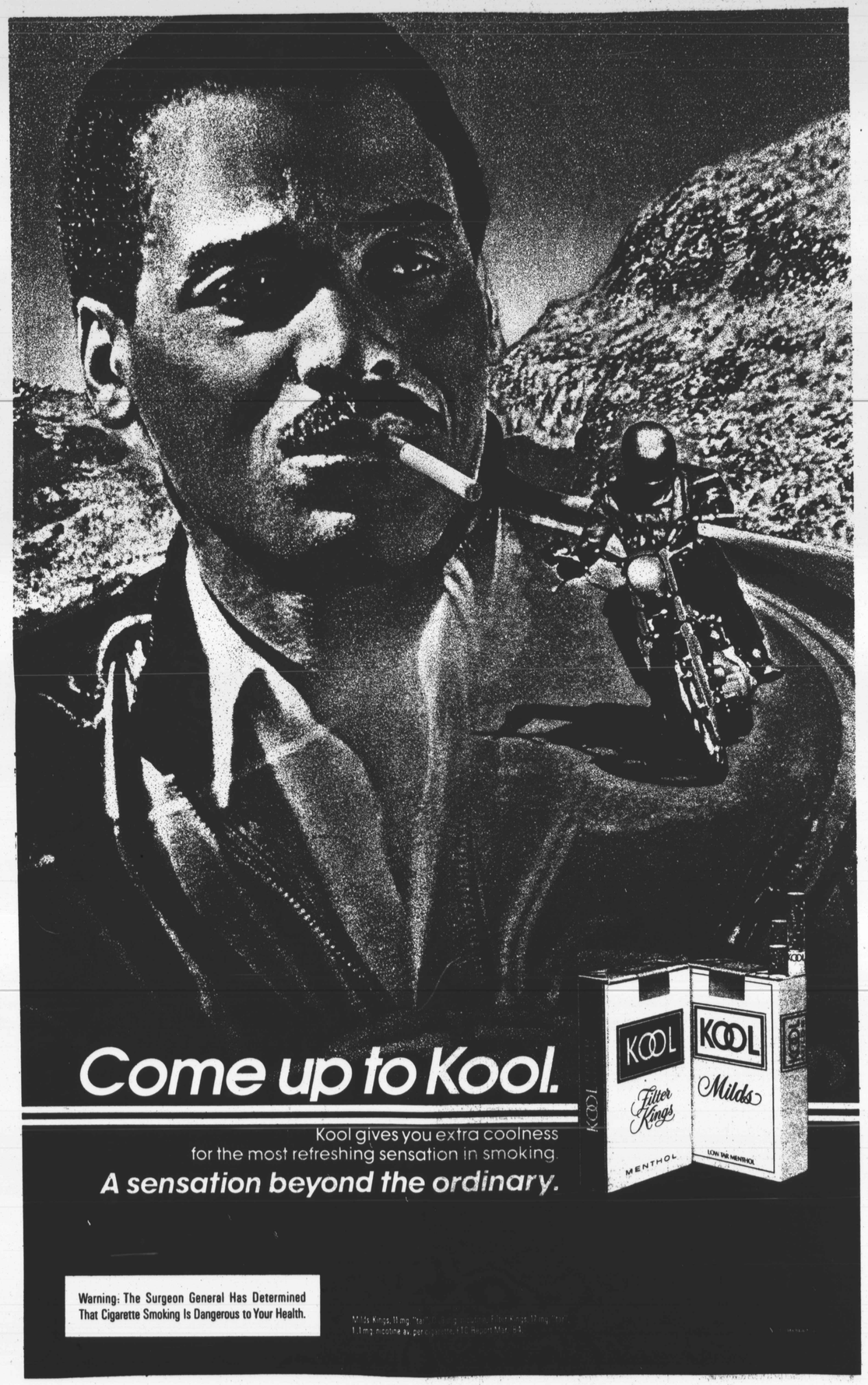

The COTTON CLUB

Ida M. Peters

What's Happening

. . . in "Showboat"

. . . "Cotton Club"

. . . "Sparkle"

Lonette McKee

Heads turn as the tall regal beauty strides down the Harlem sidewalk. Clothed in quiet elegance, she makes her way in supreme self - confidence toward the storied canopy of the Cotton Club.

It is the first glimpse of the golden showgirl, Lila Rose Oliver, in Francis Coppola's re - creation of Jazz Age America called "The Cotton Club." And before she is through, Lila Rose Oliver will speak for a whole generation lost in the racial limbo of the period.

"At that time," explains Broadway star Lonette McKee, who portrays her, "it was almost incumbent for a girl like Lila Rose, with her talent and coloring, to 'pass.' That meant she could work Broadway, the road — white shows. But if she's in love with a black man — as Lila Rose eventually is with Sandman — she has to pass him right by."

Also starring in the Robert Evans Presentation for Orion Pictures release is Gregory Hines as the show - stopping dancer who falls for Lila Rose.

For actress - singer McKee, the evolution of Lila Rose from a member of the Cotton Club's mulatto chorus line to a 'white' singer wailing Harold Arlen torch songs in a downtown bistro — and the love that purposes her through both identities — gave the character depth as well as gloss.

She was delighted to land it as her fourth and most complex motion picture role.

The choice was a relatively simple one for Coppola, Evans and company to make. After all, McKee is not only beautiful and talented, she is also finely tuned by now to the angry ambivalence of a character like Lila Rose.

Winner of a Tony nomination for her performance as the doomed 'mulatto' Julie in the Broadway revival of "Show Boat," she also earned warm critical praise as Mrs. Jackie Robinson, wife of the Dodger Hall of Famer who broke baseball's color barrier, in Broadway's "The First."

Born in Detroit, McKee studied ballet with Sarah Taylor and voice and music with Dini Clark in Los Angeles before beginning her professional career. Songwriter as well as singer, she recorded an album of her own tunes entitled "Words and Music."

Since her screen debut in the 1977 comedy, "Which Way Is Up?" with Richard Pryor, she has alternated between theatre and films. Other screen appearances are with Sean Connery in Richard Lester's adventure - love story, "Cuba," and with Irene Cara in "Sparkle," the story of the rise of a singing group not unlike the Supremes, which brought McKee critical praise for her "vivid performance" (Leonard Maltin).

Married and living in Manhattan, McKee's current goal is to build a facility for handicapped youths. She plans to name it Carol Park after her sister, a cerebral palsy victim still living in Detroit, along with McKee's mother and other sister.

Senator Troy Brailey helped AFRO's Mrs. Santa make her goal and help needy families this Christmas.

Mrs. Dorothy L. Toulson helps with Mrs. Santa to feed hungry families in memory of her slain husband Herman L. Toulson Jr., the guard who was slain at the City Jail.

Millie Jackson off South African Boycott list

Millie Jackson as guest of Ambassador Youssoufou and James Victor Gbeho.

New York — Declaring that she would never entertain in South Africa again until segregation barriers against the black majority population are removed, singer Millie Jackson's statement was warmly applauded by a number of United Nation Ambassadors here at the UN.

As the guest of Ambassador Oumarou Youssoufou, executive secretary of the Organization of African Unity, representing all black nations on the African continent, and a number of black UN dignitaries, the popular recording artist was firm in her support for the 20 million black residents who live under an apartheid government, who exercise dictatorial powers, and their struggles to obtain freedom. Several years ago she played there and since has suffered a boycott because of it by many black nationalist groups because of her actions.

Saying that everybody makes mistakes and should be forgiven once they acknowledge the errors of their ways, Youssoufou said that he and his associates now looked positively upon her remarks. As a result of this, he said he supported her for what she now stands for and urged anyone boycotting her to cease and and desist.

Celebrities

Prince took time out from his Purple Rain tour dates in Washington, DC (here he's broken every attendance record in the city's history) to surprise 3,100 students at Gallaudet College, America's only liberal arts institute for the deaf. Prince had his lights and sound system set up at the school's fieldhouse, then played an unannounced free concert for the school's 2,500 students and for 600 underprivileged Washington high school students who had been bussed in without being told what they were about to attend.

The majority of those in the audience may have been deaf, but according to observers, most were die - hard Prince fans, rocking back and forth to the rhythms of the music that they felt rather than heard. Prince returned their affection. At the end of the concert he flashed "I love you" to the crowd in sign language.

In her first week on KISS-FM (New York), "ROXANNE, ROXANNE" became the listener's No. 1 request in the Top 15 Countdown. Listeners at Power - 99 and WDAS have made her No. 1 in Philadelphia. Ditto for the many stations in Virginia playing her.

And on the week's "Hit List — A Nick Johnson Survey" (retail survey), she nails down the No. 1 spot after only three weeks on the chart. In addition to New York, "Roxanne, Roxanne" is the No. 1 seller in Philadelphia, Virginia, and New England, and is fast becoming the sales leader in each new area she enters.

"Roxanne, Roxanne" has caused the demand for UTFO concerts and personal appearances to catapult. All of this coming on the heels of UTFO's two European tours and multiple U.S. engagements (live and on TV) with Whodini and the success of their first release "BEATS AND RHYMES" (Select No. 62241).

DEC