AREA ENTERTAINMENT

MAKING THE ROUNDS

with Bonnie Butler

Fate indeed quite often has fickle fingers! For many moons, community voices have been calling for diversified entertainment fare that will satisfy the tastes of the various local ethnic societies.

Entreaties apparently fell on deaf ears at the Power Plant and the Fishmarket and they were shuttered.

Interesting about the latter is that Robert Embry in 1985, as head of a committee appointed to make recommendations for use for the Fishmarket building drew the conclusion that "once the subway station is built and the offices constructed, then Market Place may find the people it needs to make the development successful. The idea of having an entertainment area is a good idea, it's viable but not today."

The subway has been there long enough, the Inner Harbor attracts millions of tourists and the Fishmarket needs cleaning.

Now comes Pier 6, where for some 10 years the choice attractions have been suspect in some circles.

So, before I get to the part of this column dealing with events happening around town, I want to share with you some observations regarding the Pier 6 concert series.

In reviewing the acts that have been scheduled this year and in year's past and hearing the tale of woes from the organization running this annual event on why more Blacks don't attend the concerts, I thought I would pass along my thoughts on the subject.

Are you listening Pier 6?

These comments are intended to help, not hurt the fine group of people who produce the shows each year.

Pieces of a Dream in town June 27

To begin with, there is only one Black representative on the five member board, State Senator Larry Young. His is the only apparent voice that consistently thinks of and is experienced with the preferences of the Black community.

Solution? Why not add an additional African - American to the board. Someone who has his pulse on the entertainment scene - the likes and dislikes of the Black ticket - buying market! ! !

Secondly, take another look at the acts that have been scheduled. More of the acts should have a universal appeal. Case in point - Johnny Mathis.

In all fairness, I called the Pier and spoke with John Wright, who serves as the principle promoter for the series. Wright said they have earnestly sought out Black acts but have run into political and economic drawbacks in pulling it off.

"We begin booking and looking for acts in January for most Black acts don't go on the road in the summer, said Wright.

"A lot of the entertainers accept the date and then cancel at the last minute. That's not to say that White acts don't do the same.

"I've tried to book some major attractions but for some reasons, acts don't want to play Pier 6 if they can play Merriweather (Post Pavilion) whose parent company has 11 venues nationwide or the Baltimore Arena.

I'm still convinced that our marketplace is sophisticated enough to warrant the best in entertainment. However, we need to open a few deaf ears before they, too, become victims of the fickle finger of fate.

* * *

Word has reached us that the 32nd Plahza on 32nd Street and Greenmount Ave. is no more. Robert Clay and Company have changed the name to Phase III. We were unable to confirm the reasons by presstime, but stay tuned.

* * *

Over Washington, D.C. way, we've heard the popular Triples on Branch Ave. in Marlow Heights — the place that for the last three years had wall folks and had to turn them away at the door — is now Gerald's Night Club and the rough and tumble crowd is there. Seems last week there was a murder in the spot. What's the deal? Stay tuned.

* * *

UPCOMING HAPPENINGS: Volcano's on Greenmount Ave. is hosting its first anniversary party on Sunday, June 24 featuring Tyler Collins and special guest SHE. The party begins at 9 p.m.

Two cancellations on the Pier 6 schedule. Jeffrey Osborne, Dianne Reeves and Gerald Albright scheduled for August 7 and the James Cleveland Gospel show scheduled for August 19. No word for the replacement for the August 7 show, but the Mighty Clouds of Joy will headline the August 19 date. More at a later date.

Don't want to close without reminding you that Pieces of a Dream and Hirosima will perform at the Pier on June 27 and George Benson comes in on June 28. See you next week.

GEORGE BENSON — At Pier 6 June 28.

Chapman brings crowd to their feet

Paula Brooks
Lifestyle Editor

Tracy Chapman and Johnny Clegg & Savuka played Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia over the week-end to the sound of thunderous applause. The audience was frequently on its feet, dancing-to the primal South African beat of Johnny Clegg, and giving standing ovations to Tracy Chapman.

Johnny Clegg and his group had charisma, choreography and stage presence to spare. The African group featured high energy throughout its performance, as they romped, kicking and gyrating through song after song. The audience was pumped up and raised clenched fists, several times in agreement with the political ideology espoused by Clegg, such as "one man, one vote" and freedom for all South Africans.

Clegg's upbringing as the only White member of three Zulu tribes, former sociology lecturer and Vice President of the South African Musicians Alliance was definitely in evidence as he performed all the movements of his Black African band members.

Says Clegg "The way I came to African forms became a political act by nature of the fact that I wasn't allowed to do them, to experience them. To me, they were fun things, things I wanted to be part of dancing with Africans at a migrant workers hostel, playing with them at night on the roofs where they live, and things I wasn't allowed because of the apartheid laws, to do."

Clegg was arrested at age 15, for political reasons, and the arrests continued, until Blacks finally began to stand up for him when the police came to take him. His musical journey began with Juluka (Zulu for sweat), an integrated band that also used traditional African forms and eventually he formed his own group, which mixed ancient South African rhythms with Savuka (I set you free), a style played on street corners in the '70s in Johannesburg.

Johnny Clegg and Savuka closedthe cultural gap, and

AFRO Concert Review

show us that good music is universal, especially when used to spread the message of justice and equality for all people.

Tracy Chapman approached the mike quietly, clutching her guitar like a life preserver. A shy smile stole across her face, as the audience leaped to its feet, surrounding her in wave after wave of applause. She looked incredulous, as if it were hard to believe all the excitement was for her.

With Tracy, standing in the spotlight in faded jeans and a black tank top, what you get is so much more than what you see. There was no fancy choreography, no introduction of band members, only lyrics that ring true to every listener. There was no lip syncing involved in this performance.

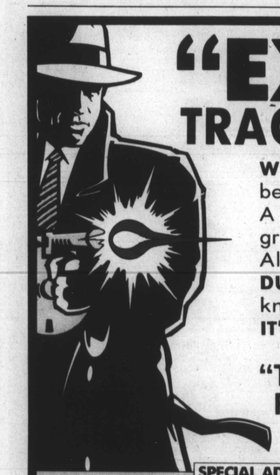
There was a Woodstock feeling, a knowledge that every word sang was sang in the spirit of unadulterated truth. Her lyrics represent a slice of life to which any human being can relate. Her opening song was "Across the Lines" from her first album. It speaks of racial tension which still continues to be a problem in 1990.

What urban dweller has not heard and cringed at the loud argument turned violent of a neighbor? Her "Behind The Wall," even more effective because of the lack of accompaniment, was followed by her cross over hit, "Fast Car," which speaks of how it feels to be locked into a dead end job, wanting social mobility, when the promise of a ride in a fast car makes life seem bearable and beatable.

"Give Me One Reason" to stay and I'll turn right back around" is a feeling of futility over the future of a relationship that most anyone can relate to, as well as "Sorry" and "Give Mr. President My Honest Regards".

Tracy Chapman captures the soul or essence of an event or feeling and relates it to her audience unadulterated. Her voice is plaintive and distinctive, and her lyrics are an uncompromising look at life.

The universal truth of her songs allows her to simply stand on stage and sing her heart out, without all the trappings of glitter and fancy footwork that most performers deem necessary to their act. Tracy Chapman should be seen at all costs-her music is real, and powerful.



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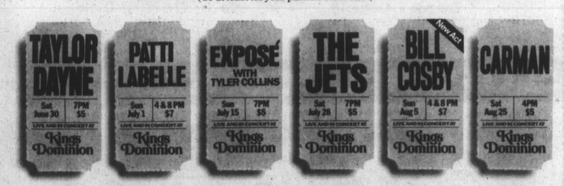

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AREA ENTERTAINMENT

Robocop and Gremlins redux: sizzling sci-fi sequels

By Frederick I. Douglass
AFRO Movie Critic

Sequels to box office hits are usually pale imitations of the original movies, "Gremlins II" and "Robocop 2" are two exceptions to this rule because both are fast paced sci - fi adventure movies laced with droll humor and ample audience appeal.

Steven Spielberg's "Gremlins" was a malicious movie about maniacal little monsters hellbent on wreaking total mayhem on the world. Gremlins 2 The New Bunch" comes off like a satire on "The Muppets Take Manhattan."

Picking up six years after the original movie left off in 1984, we find Gizmo, the only Mogwai (gremlin) with a kind bone in his body, back in the curio shop of his oriental owner, Mr. Wing (Key Luke). A determined real estate developer wants Mr. Wing's Chinatown building for a project he has dreamed up, but he refuses.

When the developer sends his henchmen to get rid of the mysterious oriental merchant, Gizmo escapes into the alley where he is captured by a warped scientist on a scavenger hunt in the inner city who takes him to an experimental lab.

Billy Peltzer (Zach Galligan) and Kate Beringer (Phoebe Cates), small town sweethearts in "Gremlins," are employees in the futuristic, high - tech Clamp Center office complex in New York where the laboratory is located.

THE GRAIN GREMLIN visit's Grandpa Fred's (Robert Prosky) horror movie show and display his intelligence to the TV audience in Warner Brothers new comedy adventure "Gremlins 2 The New Batch."

Peltzer learns Gizmo is in the lab (thanks to a whistling postman), frees him, and has his girlfriend take the Mogwai home.

Those who saw the original movie know there are certain rules that must be followed by owners of Mogwai. The main rules are "don't let them get wet, don't feed them after midnight." The results of breaking these rules lead to disastrous consequences with dozens of the evil variety of the creatures shooting out of Gizmo's back and then going on to reproduce other miscreants.

Of course, the inevitable happens and we soon find Clamp Centre swarming with hundreds of Gremlins who are boozing it up and otherwise wreaking havoc upon the building and its occupants.

When the original screenplay for Gremlins was submitted to Steven Spielberg, it was a horror story. But Spielberg and others soon realized the comic potential of the story and added a humorous twist to the first move.

With "Gremlins 2," the concept has gone totally slapstick and is rife with sight gags reminiscent of silent movies and myriad other hilarious hijinks. Be prepared to laugh until your stomach hurts if you are the kind of movie goer who can enjoy a good spoof of the horror movie genre.

Although the movie features rampant violence of the Saturday morning cartoon variety, this is one you can take your children to see — in fact, they will probably demand and entreat you to take them to one of the movie theatres where "Gremlins 2 The New Batch" is playing.

I saw the movie at Security Cinema where Sylvester Craig is doing a fantastic job as a manager. Future plans call for a profile of Craig who is one of the few Black managers of a major movie complex on the east coast.

Your children also are going to want to see "Robocop 2," but you should go see this flock by yourself first to determine if you want them exposed to the blood and gore featured in this energetic high - tech police flick.

You may recall Robocop was created when the severely damaged and dismembered body and brain of slain policeman Alex J. Murphy (Peter Weller) were combined with the latest innovations in robotics to form a virtually indestructible lawman.

He also was mentally programmed to follow orders to the letter, but by the end of the first movie, Robocop's own personality was beginning to emerge.

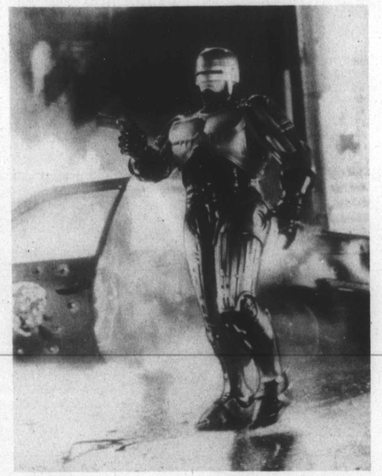
"Robocop 2" unleashes the cyborg in the battle against drugs, but he must also do battle with a new nemesis — a new and supposedly improved cyborg that has been programmed to be devoid of what are considered as Robocop's flaws, human compassion and fleeting memories of this prior existence as Alex Murphy.

The deadly, psychopathic new cyborg has a major assignment, to kill his predecessor, Robocop.

Set in the future, "Robocop 2" finds the world in a disastrous state, the Amazon rain forest has been severely damaged by radiation and a deadly new designer drug, Nuke, is raking in mucho dinero in Old Detroit. Robocop's assignment is to go into the restricted zones where the drug is produced and to wipe out the manufacturers and dealers.

Attacking hi task with gusto and verve, Robocop goes after an assortment of villains including Cain, the vicious drug merchant, portrayed by Tom Noonan; Belina Bauer as the vile psychiatrist; and scene stealer Gabriel Damon as Hob, the teenaged villain who presents Robocop with unexpected problems.

The star of this movie is the violence brilliantly choreographed by director Irvin Kershner which exceeds that of the first movie in its intensity and implementation. Violence is, in fact, a character with its own life in this adventure flick.



PETER WELLER as Robocop in the sci-fi flick "RoboCop 2."

Obviously, the personification of violence in "Robocop 2" requires the skills of an expert special effects man and Rob Bottin plays a major role in this film, bringing with him his experiences from working on movies like "Total Recall," "Twilight Zone — The Movie," and "Legend."

While Robocop 2 has a better plot than the original, the violence and special effects remain the most memorable aspects of the flick. The movie is worth seeing for these elements.

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Dunlap to direct national PBS play

Shirley Basfield Dunlap, an instructor of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts at Morgan State University, recently was requested by Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland to direct the play "From the Mississippi Delta" for its national production for WNED-TV Channel 17, a Public Broadcasting Service station.

The drama focuses on the autobiographical sketch of Dr. Holland's transition from prostitution to civil rights worker and then on to becoming a Ph.D. recipient.

During March, Ms. Dunlap directed the Maryland premiere of the play at Morgan State University.

Dr. Holland was presented with a proclamation and a citation from both the Mayor's and the Governor's Offices respectively on opening night of the play's first production at a historically Black institution world-wide.

As a member of the Morgan's extended family since 1974 and alumna, Ms. Dunlap's experience includes directing "Sistuhs and Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," two plays performed at Theatre Morgan.

Shirley Basfield Dunlap.

Ms. Dunlap's theatrical expertise continues to grow as she leaves Morgan, for the summer, to work on the one woman version of "From The Mississippi Delta" in Buffalo and then on to its performance in New Orleans scheduled November, 1990.

Top Video Sales

1. The Little Mermaid — Walt Disney Home Video
2. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Cowabunga, Shredhead — Family Home Entertainment
3. Honey, I Shrunk the Kids — Walt Disney Home Video
4. Lethal Weapon 2 — Warner Home Video
5. Harvey — MCA-Universal Home Video
6. New Kids on the Block: Hangin' Tough Live — CBS Music Video
7. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Case of the Killer Pizzas — Family Home Entertainment
8. Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade — Paramount Home Video
9. Sexy Lingerie II — HBO Video
10. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Heroes — Family Home Entertainment