Alexander O'Neal: A New Star On the Rise

He paid his dues in club bands across the Midwest and South. He might have become The Time's lead singer, but he couldn't agree to Prince's financial terms. Today, ALEXANDER O'NEAL is stepping into the spotlight with the release of his self-titled debut album on Tabu/CBS Records.

The soulful Scorpio was born November 15, 1953 in Natchez, Mississippi but moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota with his family in 1975. Over the next few years, O'Neal honed his vocal skills in a succession of popular local bands like The Mystics, Wynd Chymes, and Enterprise. His next group, Flyte Tyme, also included such budding musical talents as Jimmy Jam (James Harris III), Terry Lewis, and Monte Moir.

Under the often dictatorial direction of Prince, Flyte Tyme evolved into The Time — and went on to strike gold with best-selling hits like "Ice Cream Castles," "The Bird," and "Jungle Walk." But O'Neal and Prince didn't see eye-to-eye on the group's financial arrangements, and just prior to the recoding of The Time's first album, Alexander left the band and was replaced by Morris Day.

This turn of events barely slowed down the ambitious young singer. "I went on to form Alexander, a rock and roll band," he recalls. "Can you imagine a Black rock and roll band in the Twin Cities, doing Rolling Stones and Def Leppard songs? But I've always felt that Black artists created rock and roll: We gave it away, and they took it. If you really listen, you'll realize that the original rock and roll was just speeded-up blues."

Meanwhile, The Time had shifted personnel after their second LP. Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis struck out on their own as songwriter/producers, racking up an impressive string of chart records with artists like Cherrelle, the S.O.S. Band, and Cheryl Lynn. When Alexander O'Neal signed with Tabu/CBS Records in 1984, Jam and Lewis were the logical choice of producers for his debut album. Another former



Alexander O'Neal

Time-mate, Monte Moir, joined in to write and produce three of the album's seven tracks.

"Innocent," O'Neal's first single, shot into the upper reaches of the Soul and Dance Music charts within a few weeks of release. The song also became the basis of O'Neal's first video, shot on location in the downhome setting of Mickey's Diner in St. Paul, Minnesota. But the album, **Alexander O'Neal,** is no one-hit wonder. It's neatly divided into a "dancing side" and "romancing side"; the characteristic Jam/Lewis sound is colored with touches of acoustic piano, jazzy sax solos, and some storming lead guitar breaks.

All in all, an auspicious beginning for a most promising career. Listen for the voice of Alexander O'Neal — you're certain to be hearing more of him, in 1985 and beyond.



Get your concert tickets in advance at any Richmond area Album Den, or at Kings Dominion the day of the show. Park admission is required.

"The Homefront" Documents America In Transition

Exploring the triumphs, the consequences and the enormous social changes that came about during World War II, "The Homefront" documents the turbulent time when Americans were caught up in the greatest collective social experience in our nation's history. Narrated by Leslie Nielsen, the 90-minute documentary airs Tuesday, May 28 at 9:00 p.m. on Maryland Public Television (MPT) -- TV 22, 28, 31, 36, 62 & 67.

In many ways, the nation we recognize today as modern America was shaped by the forces of war. Industry expanded. The economy prospered. Americans escaped the unemployment and underemployment of the pre-war era and earned decent wages, acquired skills and found careers. Millions of women joined the work force for the first time. Yet, if the war brought social progress of a kind, it also accelerated those trends in American life that many have come to criticize: social fragmentation, the loss of community and an ever greater materialism.

"The Homefront" provides interviews and first-hand testimony from the people who lived through those years. Along with these testimonials, a wide range of archival footage, still photographs, newsreels, radio broadcasts and period music, cartoon and feature clips recreate an era where never before or since have the American people united so completely in a common cause.

"The Homefront" is presented by KOCE Huntington Beach and produced by the University of Southern California. The program is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Pew Memorial Trust, the President's Circle of the University of Southern California, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Former soap star now croonin' tunes

By Kimberly Redmond

Q: Can you tell me if Andrea Evans, the actress who plays Tina Clayton on "One Life to Live," ever married her former co-star Wayne Massey? — T.P., Kinston, N.C.

A: Miss Evans and Massey were married after they met on the set of the ABC soap. The couple was divorced during Miss Evans' stint as Patty Abbott on "The Young and the Restless." Miss Evans has remained single, while Massey wed country singer, Charley McClain, last July. Massey sings three duets with his wife on her new album, "Radio Heart."

Q: I heard that every year, fans of "Days of Our Lives" have a chance to meet the cast of the soap. How can I participate in the gathering this year? — L.I., Glendale, Calif.

A: Deidre Hall, the actress who plays Marlena Evans Brady on the NBC soap, and her fan club president organize the gathering every year. If you write to the actress, she'll supply you with more details. Address your letters to Miss Hall, c/o "Days of Our Lives," NBC, 3000 W. Alameda Ave., Burbank, CA. 91505.

Q: I have a bet with my friend that Julianna McCarthy and Brenda Dickson, who play mother and daughter on "The Young and the Restless," are mother and daughter in real life. Am I correct? — E.G., Colorado Springs, Colo.

A: Hope you didn't bet a bundle. The actresses are not related.

(Have a question about soap operas? Write Kimberly Redmond at 200 Park Ave., Room 602, New York, NY 10166. Questions cannot be answered personally but those of general interest will be answered in future columns.)

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At The Movies

"Rappin's" Not Happenin,' "Creature's" a Dull Feature

I went to "Rappin" hoping to see a toe-tapping, finger-snapping movie about one of the major trends sweeping the music industry — rap records. What I saw instead was a boring movie, one that was not the least bit "fresh" as they say in the vernacular of rapping. Obviously, the genre of breakin' and rappin' movies has been bled dry as the sun bleached desert.

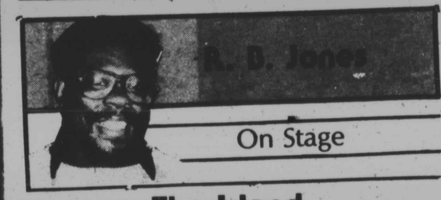
One of the few redeeming qualities of "Rappin' "was the performance of "Itching for A Scratch" by the Force M.D.'s, a fairly vibrant tune that is gaining ample airplay on local and national radio stations. Otherwise, "Rappn' " was a cliched, hackneyed flick that attempts to cash in on the box office lure of "Beat Street" and "Breakin'." It is a "past tense" movie that waited too long to cash in on a trend, much too long.

Starring Mario Van Peebles, the movie tells the story of Rappin' Hood, a young man who has just returned home from prison and whose only talent is to create mindless, meaningless rhymes at will. He finds that his girlfriend, his old gang and the street he once ruled have been taken over by one of his former henchmen. The obligatory fights and hassles take place between the two young men as they align themselves on opposing sides in a struggle to displace the residents of an inner city neighborhood. Just like in "Breakin 2," which was put out by the same movie studio, there is an unscrupulous developer who wants to tear down properties so that he can make a megabucks profit by building a new complex.

And, just like in "Breakin' 2," the residents of the community rise up to defend their turf and to preclude the plans of the sinister real estate corporation. But instead of dancing to raise funds to save the property like they did in "Breakin' 2," Mario Van Peebles and his followers go to court and rap their way out of a tough situation. How's that for a ghetto fairy tale? Boring? You bet!

Numbed by my experience of watching and, unfortunately, listening to the drivel patter and chatter of "Rappin'," I went to see "Creature," hoping to be shocked back into a state of alertness. Alas, it proved to be another fruitless venture because "Creature" was an even more boring movie feature.

If you have seen "The Blob," "The Alien," or some of the other Grade-B classics about invaders from outer space, then you will find "Creature" to be on the lowest scale of this genre of movies. But even if viewing "Creature" represents your first time of going to the movies, you will be extremely disappointed, disgusted and disgrunted when you leave the theatre.



On Stage

The Island

Amid the frivolity and irrelevance that often pass for great theater in this society and standing aside from the sugar-coated theatrical apologetics for the current state of the world there are theater productions that touch the molten core of what art should be, a provocation to the senses and the emotions.

There are some stages that contain the questing spirit of humanity seeking to grapple with the great issues of the day and the troubling questions that seem to plague humanity perpetually.

The Artist of Freedom Theater Company, a new theatrical group in this city, produced Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona collaborative play "The Island" at St. John's United Methodist Church last weekend. I sincerely hope that this production can be revived somewhere in the city.

Mphela Makgoba and Mitchell Ferguson gave performances that seared the emotions with their power and their humanity. "The Island" depicts the relationship between two cellmates on Robben Island, the prison where the government of South Africa keeps its most celebrated political prisoners.

This island lies 10 miles off the coast and its isolation and bleakness are meant to break the spirit of the inmates. The two cellmates retain their humanity despite the worst efforts of their jailers.

Although this play is a scathing indictment of apartheid and its vicious attack on the humanity of the black residents of South Africa, the play does not sacrifice art for the sake of the message. Essentially, the realism of the portrayals by the two actors made the message more apparent. John and Winston are imprisoned political activists, but they are also men with strengths and flaws and self-doubts. Their frailty makes their heroic gestures more grand. Their bickering over mundane issues makes them identifiable people rather than cardboard representations of issues or victimized groups.

Makgoba, a native of South Africa, gave a performance of depth and eloquence. His voice is an excellent, instrument, deep and resonant and he uses it skillfully. Ferguson does not possess as great a voice as his colleague, but he effects a South African accent skillfully. The accent is not too thick nor does it distract him enough that his characterization is undermined.

To call the play magnificent is not to indulge in hyperbole. The play ends with the two prisoners performing the Greek tragedy, "Antigone," for an inmate talent show. John has found out that he will be paroled in three months, yet he and Winston insist on performing the play which deals with the civil disobedience of the individual versus the compulsion to obey the laws of the state. Although the conflict they portray took place in ancient Greece, its relevance to the issue of human rights in South Africa literally cries out.

"The Island" was a production that was gripping and timely. Hopefully, The Artist of Freedom Theater Company will continue to produce plays.

