

CharisMatters

Black Actors Share Their Faith on the Networks

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) is set to release its newest full-length film, which features a predominantly African American cast, in June.

Something to Sing About tells the story of Tommy Blessed (Darius McCrary of Family Matters) who's seeking a better life than the one afforded him on the streets of Chicago.

Recently released from jail, Tommy is enticed by a life of crime and drug dealing until he meets a churchgoing woman named Memaw.

Memaw, played by Irma P. Hall of Patch Adams, befriends Tommy, helps him find a legitimate job and invites him to her church, where he is introduced to the gospel and discovers "something to sing about." The cast also includes Kirk Franklin as the choir director who learns of Tommy's remarkable musical talent, and

Tamera Mowry (Sister, Sister) as Memaw's granddaughter.

The film marks the full-length directorial debut of Charlie Jordan, an African American woman, and is one of the BGEA's only films featuring a predominantly black cast. World Wide Pictures, the motion picture ministry of the BGEA, has produced more than 125 films, and plans to release the film on DVD in the fall.

Something to Sing About is just one of several films in the

works that have Christian themes yet target a mainstream audience. Provident Entertainment, which produced the surprise hit *The Omega Code*, is working on a five-picture deal with Signal Hill Pictures.

The projects are expected to present a message of spiritual enlightenment, yet may not be as overtly evangelistic as *Something to Sing About*, which features a clip from a Billy Graham crusade and shows the lead character praying the sinner's prayer.

—Adrienne S. Gaines

Before Jesus, After Jesus

Valerie P. Johnson has come from dope to hope, from death to life. Johnson says she's come from the "guttermost to the uttermost" since she met Jesus.

"I existed in a miserable lifestyle during which every waking moment was spent in an endless pursuit of drugs," Johnson told *Charisma*. "My downward spiral began innocently enough with the casual use of marijuana."

Her "casual" habit gradually escalated to the point that she had to smoke pot first thing every morning. Her addiction also left her struggling with tobacco cravings and serious alcohol abuse.

She systematically rotated her use of the drugs of choice—including the hallucinogenics LSD and mescaline, amphetamines, barbiturates, heroin and cocaine, and finally, crack cocaine and pure heroin.

To support her drug abuse, she often broke the law, and ended up with an extensive criminal record. She had been beaten, stabbed, stalked and raped, and her attempts at drug rehabilitation failed.

Fortunately, she had not committed any serious crimes, and would spend a maximum of 15 days at any given time in the local county jail.

“When Jesus answered my cry,
He removed every addiction instantly.”

Today, this
transformed woman
is an evangelist and
volunteer chaplain. She says she is
“happily married” to pastor James J. Johnson, superintendent of the Suffolk District of the Church of God in Christ in Virginia. “Most of all, I am a sinner saved by grace,” Johnson adds.

—Billy Bruce

Wisconsin Baby Strikes Spiritual Pose

Kelsey Doohan, daughter of Daniel and Laura Doohan of Athens,

Wis., shook up her mom and a retail store photographer

when she offered this prayerful pose (below) for 10 seconds during a recent photo session. Kelsey, who has a twin sister named Katie, was 9 months old when the photographer captured the image.

“We did not ask her to pose like that,” mother Laura Doohan told a local newspaper. “She just did it. I believe the Holy Spirit in Kelsey caused her to glorify our heavenly Father.”

The Doohans live on a dairy farm near Athens with their other children: Corey, 10; Sissey, 8; Bridgette, 3; and Katie.

—Billy Bruce

Rabbi Triggers Angry Reaction From Some Jews

Evangelist Morris Cerullo’s commitment to evangelize Jews has always stirred controversy. But the 68-year-old preacher, who is Jewish himself, has never backed down once in 30 years from his mission to deliver the gospel to his Jewish brethren.

Cerullo recently released *Rabbi*, a full-length feature film about a rabbi whose son is a Messianic Jew. The rabbi disowns his son and bans him from the family until tragedy strikes. The son then is able to provide a strong witness of the true Messiah.

In March, Cerullo released *Rabbi* in a TV blitz that brought

the film to viewers of 244 major TV stations in the United States and around the world. Initially, 26,000 viewers called in after the broadcasts, and 20,000 of those asked to receive a plaque featuring a Hebrew and English translation of Numbers 6:24-26. According to a ministry spokesman, viewer call-ins to date have supported the film.

“The response is a tremendous statement of the degrees to which the film has met a spiritual need,” a Cerullo spokesman said.

Despite severe criticism from Orthodox rabbis who claim the film is anti-Semitic because it attempts to convert Jews away from Judaism, and despite the lingering fallout from Cerullo’s mass mailing of evangelistic tracts to thousands of Jewish homes in Israel, Cerullo remained firm about his commitment to spread the gospel among Jews.

“In every outreach we have ever undertaken to reach the Jews, we have faced strong opposition and criticism,” Cerullo states. “There has been such a hardness and from well-intentioned Christians. If there were ever a time to reach out to God’s chosen people, it is today.”

Watch local TV listings for the showing of *Rabbi*, which will appear on every major network including FOX, ABC, NBC, CBS, UPN, PAX and WB.

—Billy Bruce

THE JUNE LIST

No. 1 Christian hardback: Maximize the Moment, T.D. Jakes (Putnam)

No. 1 paperback: The Power of a Praying Wife, Stormie Omartian (Harvest House)

No. 1 fiction book: Left Behind, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (Tyndale)

No. 1 CD: Lay It Down, Jennifer Knapp (Gotee)

Where Are They Now?

Christian rapper Michael Peace is still using the language of the streets to reach urban youth with the gospel.

When Christian rapper Michael Peace was on the cover of Charisma in February 1990, he was ministering to youth and gangbangers in inner-city Chicago. He communicated the gospel in the language of the streets, blazing a trail in a musical genre that was beginning to make huge waves in the mainstream.

It has been six years since Peace, now 41, released his last rap album, Out of Control (Star Song), but that's mostly because he's been too busy to focus on recording.

After he appeared on our cover, Peace continued traveling the country and even journeyed as far away as Europe ministering in juvenile correctional facilities, prisons and jails. But soon he was invited to speak in schools, then before city councils, and later before governors to talk about urban youth and youth culture.

After a while, he redirected his focus to his own backyard, and in 1995 he became youth pastor at his church, Bethel Full Gospel Church in Rochester, N.Y. "I had done so much across the country, people

began to ask why I wasn't doing anything in my own city."

He still speaks in schools, and with his friend James Heath has developed a Bible-based program teaching teens about abstinence, as well as an after-school program.

"I'm given the liberty to speak about the things of God and what He can do in a person's life," Peace adds.

Peace was recognized in 1994 for his work among youth when he received the African American of Distinction award from the state of New York.

"That award to this day has given me entrance into a lot of venues." In October, he was put in charge of all urban ministry and outreach at Bethel, and he soon will become chaplain of a local juvenile correction facility.

It's a little amazing when he remembers the day he wrote his first rap song.

"When I first became a Christian, the youth pastor at my church said God had a unique way of using everyone to reach the lost. I went home and prayed, and about 10 to 20 minutes

later I found myself writing down rhymes."

That was a surprise for a guy who couldn't stand poetry. He enjoyed listening to rap, but admits, "This was something way outside of my character."

Though he says God never called him to be a rapper, Peace says the genre was an effective tool in fulfilling his true calling to be an evangelist. "God gave me rap to be a springboard for doing that," he says.

Peace, who is married and has a 10-year-old son, is considered by younger rappers to be one of the genre's trailblazers, and he isn't ruling out the possibility of recording another album.

Today there are dozens of Christian rap artists out there, though they say they don't get much

more airplay or better marketing than Peace did in the early days.

Yet Peace encourages younger rappers to stay focused on what really counts. The No. 1 goal is to reach the lost, not the church, he says.

"I'd rather win millions or tens of thousands [of people] to Christ and walk on streets of gold than have gold records," Peace says.

"Let's win our cities for Christ. I'd rather make sure it was hard for a person to go to hell in my city. That's what I try to speak into the hearts of Christian rappers."

–Adrienne S. Gaines

We've Got Charisma!

After reading “Why Do Christians Shoot Their Wounded?” by David Kyle Foster (March 1998), the Lord directed me to preach a sermon at my church, Calvary Evangelical Baptist

Church in Portsmouth, Va., from the basic themes of the article.

This subject leaped off the page at me because I am personally aware of instances when the church was extremely condemning when a fellow believer fell into sin. I know of homosexuals, alcoholics, drug addicts and other “sinners” who are more compassionate than holy, sanctified, upstanding church folk.

Even animals will nurture and protect their wounded. I was watching a program on the Animal Planet channel that showed a water buffalo that fell victim to a pride of lions. He was severely wounded, but his fellow water buffaloes ran the lions off and helped get him to a pond where he would be safe from further attack. Christians don't do that. When a Christian is hurt by falling into sin, we judge, condemn and sometimes even quit praying for that person.

In my sermon, I highlighted the six points the article gave for why Christians abandon one another. Then I gave instruction on how we should respond to fallen Christians, encouraging believers to let mercy triumph over judgment. Thank you, *Charisma*, for not settling for the status quo and for challenging others to do the same.

–Ron L. Taylor, Portsmouth, Virginia