

Documentary shines; thriller falls flat

By Judith Trojan
NC News

NEW YORK — "Physical Evidence" (Columbia) features Burt Reynolds as a hard-living, veteran detective whose hot temper gets him in a mess of trouble. If the scenario sounds familiar, it should. It's been played out for better or worse by Reynolds and every other tough guy movie hero a zillion times before.

Suspended from the Boston police force — although only one minor character in the cast attempts a Boston accent — Joe Paris (Reynolds) is drowning in a sea of booze and unpaid bills when he is arrested for the grisly murder of a sleazy nightclub owner. Since the victim doubled as a snitch for the cops, he had a line on every hood and crooked cop in town, and a trail of lucrative blackmail deals to boot.

Despite the victim's lack of popularity, honest hot-headed Paris wins the contest for most likely murder suspect. He is represented by yuppie public defender Jenny Hudson (Theresa Russell). Jennie's dress-for-success, vapid manner and insufferably smug fiancé, Kyle (Ted McGinley), do little to engage Paris' trust, and her Nancy Drew murder investigation dead-ends at every turn.

Russell ("Black Widow") is a fine actress, but somehow falls flat in the scene-chewing role of Jenny Hudson. There's no chemistry between client and lawyer, and

she consistently overshadows Reynolds, who performs his usual semiwalk-on role here.

Director Michael Crichton ("Coma") fails miserably to rev up his sleepwalking cast and derivative scenario. The courtroom scenes are abysmally dull. And the anti-yuppie gags, attractive attire and female heroics make for innocuous entertainment but do nothing to disguise the lack of thrills in this thriller.

Due to some profanity and moments of bloody violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Voices of Sarafina'

Noted documentarian Nigel Noble takes a behind-the-scenes look at the Broadway hit musical "Sarafina!" in his latest film, "Voices of Sarafina!" (New Yorker).

Noble's camera catches the exuberance of the young black players from South Africa, and through their on-screen rap and a great deal of input from writer-director Mbongeni Ngema, the play's political origins unfold in dramatic fashion.

The musical was originally produced in 1987 in Johannesburg, South Africa, to commemorate the Soweto uprising of 1976, when 15,000 black schoolchildren protested government pressure to use Afrikaans as their official language. Subse-

quently the production ran at New York's Lincoln Center and then moved on to kudos on Broadway.

Since black South African youths are in the vanguard of the anti-apartheid movement, the black performers in "Sarafina!" communicate firsthand what it's like to grow up in a repressive homeland. The drama of the musical numbers, both in rehearsal and actual performance, is intensified by backstage reminiscences filled with memories of young friends who disappeared during periods of brutal military detention.

Yet, despite their current seat of security in New York City, the kids have hopes for their future in South Africa, which they miss terribly.

"Voices of Sarafina!" works well on two levels. It is both a slickly filmed promotional piece for an unusual Broadway show and a startling introduction to the role of South African children in the fight for black liberation. No one will be immune from the spirit and talent of these young people. Their dedication to their craft and cause is evident during an incredibly moving scene in which they meet for the first time their idol in exile, singer Miriam Makeba.

Although parents might want to be cautious in allowing young children to see this film due to some dramatic, realistically choreographed stage violence and some



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Leleti Khumalo stars as Sarafina in the movie "Voices of Sarafina." The documentary deals with school children's protest in South Africa.

difficult-to-understand dialects, older adolescents and adults — especially in educational settings — will find much to share and discuss after viewing this film.

Due to some climactic choreographed stage violence perpetrated against kids, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. Not rated by the MPAA.

Death

Continued from page 1

rate of only 50 per million, according to Tom Buckner, assistant director of the New York State Coalition for Criminal Justice.

Clare Regan disputed the death penalty's economic justification by citing a 1982 study conducted by the New York State Defenders Association. The study showed that New York state would spend \$1.8 million dollars on a condemned prisoner who went through just the minimal appeal process. Supporting the same person in prison for life would cost approximately \$500,000.

But Senator Volker, who is a Catholic, disagrees with the bishops' stance. He connects the repeal of the death penalty "to a whole series of events linked to the moral decline of the country," and ties the ending

of capital punishment to the legalization of abortion. "I think an inevitable consequence when we repealed the death penalty is that we were saying life wasn't worth as much," he said.

Father Firpo, who met with Senator Volker during the Critical Issues Day, said the senator voiced the same argument at that time. "I told him that by returning to the death penalty we are furthering the erosion of respect for life instead of enhancing the dignity of the person," he said. "I made mention of the reaction of the crowd to the execution of Mr. (Ted) Bundy (executed Jan. 24 in Florida). I did not see a greater promotion of the dignity of human life through the reaction of the crowd."

According to press accounts, the Florida crowd carried signs celebrating the execution and chanted such things as "Burn Bundy Burn."

Defense attorney Charles Crimi, who participated in a death penalty forum Feb.

6 at St. Mary's Church, Rochester, compared the crowd cheering Bundy's execution to the spectators in the Roman Coliseum. "Where do they feel that Christ would be, with those carrying the placards or in the prison with the prisoners?" he speculated.

In his presentation at St. Mary's, Crimi addressed the many social and legal concerns surrounding the death penalty issue, but summarized his own stance as a Christian from a faith perspective. "If you believe in the fact that man has a soul and the

soul can be redeemed and that sin can be forgiven and that people can change, then you would be against the death penalty," he said. "If you kill somebody, you kill not only the body, but also the soul in the sense that the soul has no more time to repent."

"I don't know if you can ever say that if one person commits a wrong, another person should commit a wrong to right it," Crimi continued. "(Death) is a power that is given only to God and not to the agents of any state."

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