

Whoopi Goldberg stands out



With her trademark hairdo and unusual name, actress/comedian Whoopi Goldberg stands out in a crowd. She also stands out onstage. The New York-native had a cult following as a stand-up comedian when director Steven Spielberg caught her one-woman Broadway show and decided to cast her in "The Color Purple."

As the much-abused wife of a Southern farmer in that 1985 film, Goldberg received an Oscar nomination and won a Golden Globe award. Her following films were box-office and critical disappointments, so Goldberg returned to the stage and appeared on TV. Most recently, she has had a recurring role as a bartender who dispenses wisdom and drinks on "Star Trek: The Next Generation."



Whoopi Goldberg

Goldberg was a struggling comedian when director Mike Nichols ("Working Girl") saw her perform onstage and brought her one-woman show to Broadway. The album based on that show won Goldberg a Grammy for Best Comedy Recording.

The one-time welfare mother makes her network series debut on the CBS sitcom "Bagdad Cafe," which is based on the film of the same name. Goldberg plays the eccentric owner of a coffee shop in the middle of the desert. Jean Stapleton, best known as Edith Bunker on "All in the Family," helps Goldberg run the cafe.

Q. You're working on not one but two television series, and you have two feature films coming up, plus your one-woman stage show and yet another "Comic Relief" on cable. Why do you work so much?

A. Mortgage payments.

Q. If "Bagdad Cafe" is a ratings hit and returns next season, does that mean fans of "Star Trek" will have to do without you in the 24th century?

A. I can do both. Remember those mortgage payments. We tape "Bagdad" on Fridays. I can slip into "Star

STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

Trek" after five. "Star Trek" has been really kind to me. They let me get to them when I can.

Q. Won't it be confusing beaming back and forth between "Bagdad Cafe" and interstellar space?

A. Jean (Stapleton) has more hair than ("Star Trek's") Capt. Picard, so I shouldn't have trouble keeping the two shows straight. Plus, the cafe doesn't fly.

Q. Your first film gave you a starring role, and it earned you an Oscar nomination. The following films haven't been nearly so successful as "The Color Purple." Has your career been anticlimactic?

A. Before "The Color Purple," I spent years living in a van. All that time I wanted to make films. After "The Color Purple," I got to do that. I'm not disappointed in my film career. It's been a magic experience

'A sitcom isn't all that different from stand-up. It's just less pressurized.'

— Whoopi Goldberg

I've gone through the past four to five years.

Q. The critics have not been kind to your films after "The Color Purple," and the public has largely ignored them.

A. I've been called many things, but never a flash in the pan. I know I haven't lived up to the expectations many people had that I would become the female Eddie Murphy. Well, I'm not Eddie Murphy. My films don't make a billion dollars, but I haven't done anything I'm ashamed of. The critics hated "Fatal Beauty" and "Jumpin' Jack Flash," but when I'm on tour, people come up to me and say they loved those movies. That makes me feel good.

Q. As a stand-up comedian, you get to control the material and your per-

formance. As an actress, you have to follow the script and take orders from a director. Which do you prefer?

A. Acting allows me to collaborate with other people, and that takes the pressure off my shoulders to come up with a joke. But even so, a sitcom isn't all that different from stand-up. It's just less pressurized.

Q. I read that you took a small supporting role on "Star Trek: The Next Generation" because you were a big fan of the original series.

A. Most futuristic films don't show many black people. That's what I liked about the original "Star Trek." They had a black woman on the bridge. It showed that our people had made it into the 24th century. That's why I was a Trekkie — and still am!

Q. How did you come to change your name from Karen Johnson to Whoopi Goldberg?

A. God gave it to me. I was standing in the garden and a burning bush said that perhaps "Karen Johnson" was not the way to go. Actually, when I get nervous onstage I make a spitting noise like a whoope cushion. For a while, I went by that name, but my mom said being called Whoopie Cushion was not a good career move, so I ended up taking my mother's maiden name, Goldberg.

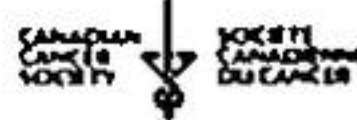
Q. When you did the first "Comic Relief" to raise money for the homeless, did you ever think you'd be doing four of them?

A. I didn't want to do a "Comic Relief 2 or 3." I hoped the government would step in after the first one. We also hoped the government would match the funds we raised. It's a bitch to have to do it again. Last year, we raised \$4.6 million. I think that shows the American people are sick and tired of the homeless on the street. The government should be spending money on them instead of sending it to Nicaragua and Panama.

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Which one's Jeremy?

The Georgetown Little Theatre is getting ready to open its production of "Here Lies Jeremy Troy" at the John Elliott Theatre this Thursday. The first performance at 8 p.m. will raise funds to help the Georgetown and District Seniors Association build a seniors centre. The play is a farce written by Jack Sharkey and directed by Ron Hunt. Tickets are \$10 and may be obtained from any member of the association or by calling 877-9714 or 877-1105. Here, Jeff Welsh (left), Belinda Kruger and Paul Wagner practice one of the more fun scenes from the play. (Herald Photo)

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