



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for Raisin

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Wiz sold out at Saturday matinee. That was all it took to encourage Twentieth Century Fox to plunk down another \$120,000 for a saturation advertising campaign.

Ken Harper had a concept for the TV commercial, a telescoped version of the Yellow Brick Road scene, with punched up orchestration of the song, "Ease On Down the Road." "I wanted the commercial to appeal to people between the ages of 18 and 35," he said. For \$30,000 the commercial was produced by Blaine Thompson, the agency that had done the successful Pippin commercial.

Diener-Hauser, an agency with experience buying air time for commercials and connections to get the time cleared fast, purchased 101 commercial spots for The Wiz Company--17 in prime time and 84 in fringe time. These commercial were crammed into a two-week period, during which time word of The Wiz reached 95 per cent of all local TV households 7.7 times. "Ease On Down the Road" became so popular it's destined to become a hit single, distributed by Atlantic Records. (In an ironic twist, Atlantic also got to do the cast album because Fox let its option lapse.)

While television advertising of films is a highly developed marketing technique, it's only recently begun to be used for Broadway properties. Apparently, if handled well, it can work wonders. A week after the commercial went on the air, The Wiz began grossing over \$100,000 a week. Two weeks after, all performances were selling out.

"This only works," Harper assured me,

[[image-black and white man in jumpsuit singing to group of costumed actors]]

[[column 2]]

"if what you're selling is good. No amount of money and advertising will sell a piece of shit."

He can say that now, with ease, for The Wiz has been honored by the Tony awards (as we go to press, it has just won in 7 categories including "Best Musical"). The album has been cut now, produced in slick, recording studio-style, laid down section by section and mixed later, for utter perfection. It will be a "concept" album and will sell, Harper hopes, like "Tommy" and "Jesus Christ Superstar."

The way his intuition has been paying off, Harper may end up making that hundred million dollar dream come true.

ADDENDUM: The night I went to see The Wiz, the theatre was packed with a rollicking, enthusiastic crowd-- high steppers, big black mamas and little kids with cornrowed hair; white professorial types, their wives, their hippy kids. It was a mob scene that looked like a circus crowd, only better dressed. A mob that clapped in time to the music and shouted out to the actors and in general received the production like nothing Broadway's ever seen before. I squinted my critical eyes, staring at the incredible costumes, the super-slick song-and-dance routines, the opulent theatrical effects, refusing to clap every two seconds, when suddenly I noticed my toe tapping. I could not resist what was going on in front of me, and behind me, and on all sides, as if the audience had been orchestrated right into the production. And when, at the very end, Stephanie Mills, a very talented, completely appealing little black girl ran across the apron of the stage, shouting, "Toto!" to the little white dog, I have to admit a tear sprang to my eye.

That, folks, is the story of how "The Wiz" was won.

[[image-black and white of a woman wearing a dress with her hair up in bows]]

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[[full page image-black and white Catherine Deneuve in front of her is a perfume bottle that reads N°5 CHANEL PERFUME]]



Catherine Deneuve for Chanel
CHANEL N°5
Perfume in the classic bottle 12.00 to 400., Spray Perfume 9.50, Eau de
Toilette 8.00 to 22.00, Eau de Cologne 5.50, and Spray Cologne 7.50.

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