

B6 Austin American-Statesman Monday, June 21, 1982

Griffin O'Neal makes film debut 4 years late

By BOB THOMAS
Associated Press

HOLLYWOOD — Griffin O'Neal is making his film debut this summer, four years after his father had planned it.

That may not seem unusual until one considers that papa O'Neal gave up \$1 million because his son's first movie didn't pan out.

Here's the story: Ryan O'Neal, long a boxing enthusiast, signed to star in the remake of "The Champ" for MGM. His candidate to play the boy — son Griffin, then 13, Ryan was boxing every day, with Griffin as his second. Then Franco Zeffirelli announced he had chosen Ricky Schroeder as the son.

"I was furious," Ryan recalls. "I tried to call my agent, but I still had my boxing gloves on. Then I decided to go to Franco's office and punch him out, but he wasn't there. So Griffin and I just drove off the lot."

"Franco told me, 'The boy has lost his innocence — too much. Malibu life.' I said, 'You have lost your innocence, Franco. I quit.'"

O'Neal was replaced by Jon Voight.

Now there's a happy sequel. Griffin is receiving high praise for his performance as a youthful magician in "The Escape Artist," made by Francis Coppola's Zoetrope Studios and released by Filmways. Griffin appeared in the movie two summers

ago when he was 15.

The first direction by ace cinematographer Caleb Deschanel ("The Black Stallion"), "The Escape Artist" has had a troubled history, undergoing re-editing and additional shooting. The finished product displays evidence of too much fixing, but it also boasts a compelling performance by Griffin O'Neal.

Freckled and fit as a surfer, which he is, O'Neal came to an interview with his proud father. Like his sister, Tatum, O'Neal has lived with his father most of his life, following the elder O'Neal's divorce from actress Joanna Moore.

"I made four screen tests, and I lost out to another boy," the young O'Neal said. "But then they found out the other boy didn't have the skill to perform the magic. So they had to start looking again."

"At first, they tried to find a magician who could act," his father interjected. "That didn't work, so they decided to find an actor and teach him magic."

For 3½ months, the younger O'Neal underwent coaching by magician Ricky Jay, a magician's prop maker, a kitesiology professor and a lock expert.

"No lock in Malibu is safe," the older O'Neal said. "Griffin opened every lock at Zoetrope Studios, including the one to Coppola's office."

Best bets

The jazz quintet **Alive!** performs its own special blend of jazz, blues, gospel and funk at **Wylie's**, 405 W. Second St. at 9 tonight at Liberty Lunch, 405 W. Second St.

At **Wylie's**, "Kennedy's Children," Robert Patrick's award-winning drama, will be presented at 8 tonight at Wylie's, 405 E. Sixth St. Admission is \$4. Call 471-5980 for more information.

Squaring off
The Union Dancers host an old-time square dance from 8 to 11:30 tonight in the Eastwoods Room of the University of Texas Union Building. No experience necessary. Call 451-4985 for more information.

Get social
Mothers Inc. will host an old-fashioned ice cream social at 7 tonight at the south end of Pease Park, 10th Street and Lathar Boulevard. Activities include volleyball, horseshoes, frisee, games, conversation and ice cream.

Film fest
The fifth annual Classic Film Festival continues with Harry James and the Andrews Sisters in "Private Buckaroo" and "Second Chorus" with Fred Astaire and Paulette Goddard at 8:45 tonight in the Zilker Hillside Theater in Zilker Park. No alcohol or animals allowed.

The **Life's Hell Blues Band** performs at the **Asa-Tex Lounge**, the **Austin Outhouse** presents **Mark Luke Daniels**, **Ernie Say** and the **K-Tells** perform at the **Back Room**. **Pressure** performs at **Club Foot**. The **Continental Club** features **Blues Boy Hubbard** and **Folkville Ice Cream** presents **Zeus Muldoon** and **the Daves**.

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Singles scene
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Austin American-Statesman

Movie time clock

AMERICAN — "Annie" (R) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
AQUARIUS — "Beverly Hills Cop" (R) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
FOX — "Rocky III" (PG) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
HIGHLAND MALL — "The Untouchables" (PG) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
CAPITAL PLAZA — "The Untouchables" (PG) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
LAUREL — "The Untouchables" (PG) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
DOBE — "Slumber Party" (PG) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
WATSON — "The Untouchables" (PG) 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30
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