



'Hoodlum' more than an action flick

Vanessa Williams, above, plays a social worker attracted to Laurence Fishburne, who stars as a gangster caught up in a 1930s battle between the black-run numbers racket in Harlem and the Mafia in "Hoodlum," opening today. Critic Roger Ebert says director Bill Duke finds an effective balance between the inevitable action scenes and good character development, as the film explores deeper economic and racial issues.

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THE POST-STANDARD

Vicki Lawrence drops nun role for talk show

Vicki Lawrence, known for her work on "The Carol Burnett Show" and "Mama's Family," has a new talk show on the Fox network, so she's pulling out of a touring version of the stage show "Nunsense." "Sister Amnesia's Nunsense Jamboree," which plays in Syracuse in February, will feature Georgia Engel, inset, as Lawrence's replacement.



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Complete list of State Fair events.

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Photographer Troy Burt, kneeling, takes a light reading as chief photographer Greg Gillis, right, asks people to move out of the light during a shoot at Brook Farm in Skaneateles for Bon Appetit magazine.

Tim Reese/Staff Photographer

FOOD'S THE FEATURED PERFORMER WHEN BON APPETIT VISITS THE SKANEATELES FESTIVAL



Tim Reese/Staff Photographer

Picnic IN STYLE

By Barbara Stith
Staff Writer

Brook Farm bustles in August. The Saturday night performances of the Skaneateles Festival, the month-long chamber music series, take place on its porch. During the week, musicians gather at the gracious white house along the lake to eat and rehearse.

So it's not entirely unusual that a small crowd has gathered around the porch this August day. A producer stands by. So does a stylist. A photographer observes the scene through the lens of his camera. A handful of musicians, usually the centers of attention themselves, observes.

The star does nothing. It sits on a picnic basket nestled in the pachysandra.

It is a piece of pie. A piece of blackberry pie with stars cut from pastry on its lightly browned crust, gar-

nished with a dollop of whipped cream and three blackberries. The pie has been placed precisely on a china plate. The plate rests on a blue napkin. Three stems of black-eyed susans look as if someone had casually tossed them alongside the place setting. "Oh, beautiful," says photographer Greg Gillis.

■ Skaneateles Festival showcases classics — Social notebook /D2.

"That's what I like to hear," says food stylist Martha Williams.

"Looks good," says Mara Papatheodorou, style coordinator for Bon Appetit magazine. "Go for it."

Cooks across the country will gaze at the pie's photograph next August, when it's featured in Bon Appetit. The food magazine will showcase a picnic

Blackberry, page D3

Blackberry pie tops special picnic spread

Blackberry, from page D1

with David and Louise Robinson, founders of the Skaneateles Festival and owners of Brook Farm, in its monthly "Entertaining With Style" feature.

The story shows how real-life people around the country entertain — and the magazine strives to keep it realistic. Stylists typically prepare the recipes, so the featured cook can relax during the production. But *Bon Appetit* doesn't rewrite recipes, it doesn't doctor the food, and the event that's featured actually takes place.

"When it's time for the picnic, they have a picnic," Papatheodorou says. "We really want real life. We want the spontaneity, the animation."

But it's not as if a production crew — which at one point included the style coordinator from Los Angeles, two photographers from Chicago, a writer from New York City and the food stylist from Syracuse — can just drop in an hour before the picnic. The feature requires weeks of planning and several days of photography — not to mention "a zillion phone calls," says David Robinson. Even with advance preparation, some last-minute scrambling is inevitable.

Finding blackberries for the pie — actually six pies, to ensure enough would be available for the photos — proved more difficult than simply stopping at the supermarket. Williams, a food stylist with Visual Taste in Syracuse, looked for blackberries at local grocery stores. She tried the Regional Market. She started stopping at every farm stand she passed in hopes of finding somebody with blackberries.

No luck.

Finally, the Sherwood Inn in Skaneateles was able to procure 24 quarts through its supplier. Williams had two back-up plans just in case: She could call on a friend who had picked blackberries in the past at Prattis Falls or another friend who was willing to go blackberry picking at his father's farm in Tully.

"I was very much sweating the blackberries," Williams says.

Picnics at Brook Farm came to *Bon Appetit*'s attention through the Skaneateles Festival's publicists at Collins Communications in Auburn. The Robinsons had mixed feelings about sharing their picnic with *Bon Appetit*'s 1.2 million readers. They liked the publicity for the festival, but they're shy of publicity for themselves.

"The festival can use national attention, but the Robinsons don't need it," Mr. Robinson says.

His wife worried that her cooking might not be up to snuff.

"I have a certain way that I cook, and I didn't know if this would be acceptable to a modern cooking magazine," Mrs. Robinson says.

She needn't have worried. Her recipes — for chilled cucumber mint soup; old-fashioned coleslaw; six-bean salad; muffledetta, a New Orleans-style stacked sandwich; and fresh blackberry pie with whipped cream — all were tested by *Bon Appetit*.

Mrs. Robinson's biggest challenge was downsizing. The magazine is featuring a picnic for six: the Robinsons; their daughter, Peggy Manning, and her husband, John; Joan Christy, president of the festival's board of directors, and her husband, Tom Bersani.

But during the festival, Mrs. Robinson is accustomed to feeding 15 or 20 people for lunch, 20 or 30 people for dinner.

"It took me a while to slim down my thinking to six," she says. "I like to cook, and I like to think big, and I double and triple and quadruple."

The recipes for coleslaw and pie came from her mother. Mrs. Robinson grew up on a farm in central Pennsylvania, and while money was tight during the Depression, her family never lacked for wonderful food. Her mother canned fruits and vegetables and made jams and jellies. Her father raised pigs and chickens. He picked the blackberries that were turned into pies.

"I learned a lot from being a farmer's daughter," she says.

What to serve at the picnic was only one of the decisions involved in the feature. How to serve it was as least as complicated. The Robinsons have a collection of blue willow china, so it formed the basis of the serving pieces. Other china came from the Sherwood Inn, from the Behind the Inn antique store and from the collection of Susan Ferris, one of the dealers who sells antiques at the store.

Nothing is left to accident. The magazine crew gathered around the Robinsons' kitchen table as Williams debated which of two ladles to use for the soup: one with a handle angling out, the other angling up. "I like it coming up," offers Troy Burt, who's assisting Gillis with photography. One less decision to make.

Then there's the selection of a tablecloth. Williams has brought along a box of linens: quilts, coverlets, lace tablecloths, linen runners. The quilts are colorful, but Papatheodorou wonders if they'll compete too much with the patterned dishes. She considers placing a white runner in the center of a blue and white coverlet for the buffet shot.

"I feel like I'm registering for my wedding all over again," Gillis kids.

While the food is carefully prepared, it isn't dramatically altered. If she were styling a piece of pie for a pie-filling label, Williams would bake a pie filled with mashed potatoes, cut a wedge with a scalpel to prevent crumbs along the edge of the crust, scoop away some of the mashed potatoes and place the most perfect berries from cans of pie filling along the side.

But food magazines want the real thing — and when Williams cuts the pie with her scalpel, Gillis asks her whether she can rough up the edges a little bit, so it looks as if it were cut with a real knife.

The crew makes only a few accommodations to sight over taste in the pie shot. When the whipped-cream garnish for the pie turns out a little too stiff, a tub of Cool Whip Extra Creamy is substituted, its air bubbles dabbed away with a cotton swab. And when the coffee cup is filled, Gillis suggests adding a squirt of dishwashing detergent to add a few bubbles to the brew.

The hours of effort that go into a single picture should comfort cooks who wonder why their creations never turn out as well as the ones in magazines.

"I wouldn't want anybody sweating because their pie doesn't look as perfect as this," Williams says.