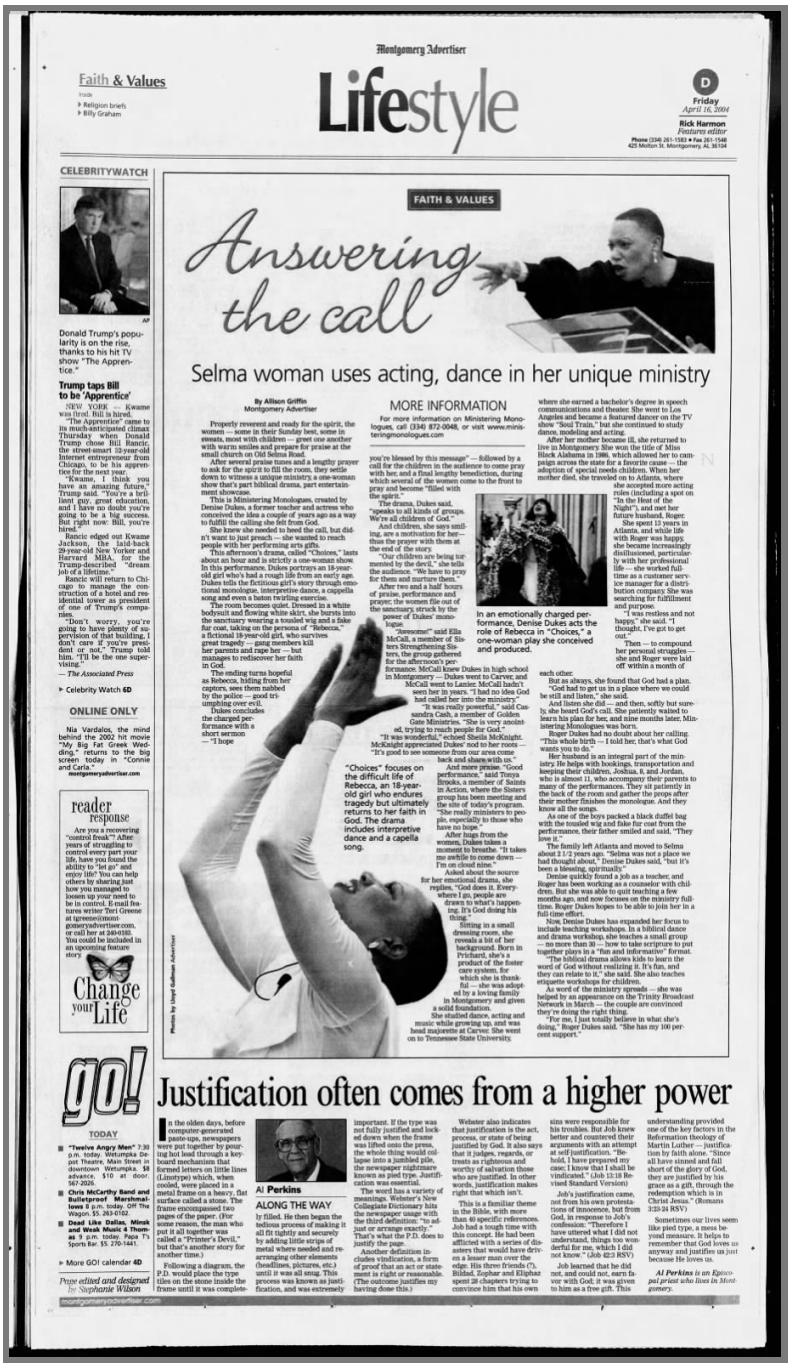

Montgomery Advertiser

Faith & Values

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CELEBRITYWATCH

Donald Trump's popularity is on the rise, thanks to his hit TV show "The Apprentice."

Trump taps Bill to be 'Apprentice'

NEW YORK — Kwame was fired. Bill is hired.

"The Apprentice" came to its much-anticipated climax Thursday when Donald Trump chose Bill Rancic, the street-smart 32-year-old Internet entrepreneur from Chicago, to be his apprentice for the next year.

"Kwame, I think you have an amazing future," Trump said. "You're a brilliant guy, great education, and I have no doubt you're going to be a big success. But right now: Bill, you're hired."

Rancic edged out Kwame Jackson, the laid-back 29-year-old New Yorker and Harvard MBA, for the Trump-described "dream job of a lifetime."

Rancic will return to Chicago to manage the construction of a hotel and residential tower as president of one of Trump's companies.

"Don't worry, you're going to have plenty of supervision of that building, I don't care if you're president or not," Trump told him. "I'll be the one supervising."

— *The Associated Press*

▸ Celebrity Watch 6D

ONLINE ONLY

Nia Vardalos, the mind behind the 2002 hit movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," returns to the big screen today in "Connie and Carla."
montgomeryadvertiser.com

reader response

Are you a recovering "control freak"? After years of struggling to control every part your life, have you found the ability to "let go" and enjoy life? You can help others by sharing just how you managed to loosen up your need to be in control. E-mail features writer Teri Greene at tgreene@montgomeryadvertiser.com, or call her at 240-0180. You could be included in an upcoming feature story.

Change your Life

FAITH & VALUES

Answering the call

Selma woman uses acting, dance in her unique ministry

By Alison Griffin
Montgomery Advertiser

Properly reverent and ready for the spirit, the women — some in their Sunday best, some in sweats, most with children — greet one another with warm smiles and prepare for praise at the small church on Old Selma Road.

After several praise tunes and a lengthy prayer to ask for the spirit to fill the room, they settle down to witness a unique ministry, a one-woman show that's part biblical drama, part entertainment showcase.

This is Ministering Monologues, created by Denise Dukes, a former teacher and actress who conceived the idea a couple of years ago as a way to fulfill the calling she felt from God.

She knew she needed to heed the call, but didn't want to just preach — she wanted to reach people with her performing arts gifts.

This afternoon's drama, called "Choices," lasts about an hour and is strictly a one-woman show. In this performance, Dukes portrays an 18-year-old girl who's had a rough life from an early age. Dukes tells the fictitious girl's story through emotional monologue, interpretive dance, a cappella song and even a baton twirling exercise.

The room becomes quiet. Dressed in a white bodysuit and flowing white skirt, she bursts into the sanctuary wearing a tousled wig and a fake fur coat, taking on the persona of "Rebecca," a fictional 18-year-old girl, who survives great tragedy — gang members kill her parents and rape her — but manages to rediscover her faith in God.

The ending turns hopeful as Rebecca, hiding from her captors, sees them nabbed by the police — good triumphing over evil.

Dukes concludes the charged performance with a short sermon — "I hope you're blessed by this message" — followed by a call for the children in the audience to come pray with her, and a final lengthy benediction, during which several of the women come to the front to pray and become "filled with the spirit."

The drama, Dukes said, "speaks to all kinds of groups. We're all children of God."

And children, she says smiling, are a motivation for her — thus the prayer with them at the end of the story.

"Our children are being tormented by the devil," she tells the audience. "We have to pray for them and nurture them."

After two and a half hours of praise, performance and prayer, the women file out of the sanctuary, struck by the power of Dukes' monologue.

"Awesome!" said Ella McCall, a member of Sisters Strengthening Sisters, the group gathered for the afternoon's performance. McCall knew Dukes in high school in Montgomery — Dukes went to Carver, and McCall went to Lanier. McCall hadn't seen her in years. "I had no idea God had called her into the ministry."

"It was really powerful," said Cassandra Cash, a member of Golden Gate Ministries. "She is very anointed, trying to reach people for God."

"It was wonderful," echoed Sheila McKnight. McKnight appreciated Dukes' nod to her roots — "It's good to see someone from our area come back and share with us."

And more praise. "Good performance," said Tonya Brooks, a member of Saints in Action, where the Sisters group has been meeting and the site of today's program. "She really ministers to people, especially to those who have no hope."

After hugs from the women, Dukes takes a moment to breathe. "It takes me awhile to come down — I'm on cloud nine."

Asked about the source for her emotional drama, she replies, "God does it. Everywhere I go, people are drawn to what's happening. It's God doing his thing."

Sitting in a small dressing room, she reveals a bit of her background. Born in Prichard, she's a product of the foster care system, for which she is thankful — she was adopted by a loving family in Montgomery and given a solid foundation.

She studied dance, acting and music while growing up, and was head majorette at Carver. She went on to Tennessee State University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in speech communications and theater. She went to Los Angeles and became a featured dancer on the TV show "Soul Train," but she continued to study dance, modeling and acting.

After her mother became ill, she returned to live in Montgomery. She won the title of Miss Black Alabama in 1986, which allowed her to campaign across the state for a favorite cause — the adoption of special needs children. When her mother died, she traveled on to Atlanta, where she accepted more acting roles (including a spot on "In the Heat of the Night"), and met her future husband, Roger.

She spent 13 years in Atlanta, and while life with Roger was happy, she became increasingly disillusioned, particularly with her professional life — she worked full-time as a customer service manager for a distribution company. She was searching for fulfillment and purpose.

"I was restless and not happy," she said. "I thought, I've got to get out."

Then — to compound her personal struggles — she and Roger were laid off within a month of each other.

But as always, she found that God had a plan. "God had to get us in a place where we could be still and listen," she said.

And listen she did — and then, softly but surely, she heard God's call. She patiently waited to learn his plan for her, and nine months later, Ministering Monologues was born.

Roger Dukes had no doubt about her calling. "This whole birth — I told her, that's what God wants you to do."

Her husband is an integral part of the ministry. He helps with bookings, transportation and keeping their children, Joshua, 8, and Jordan, who is almost 11, who accompany their parents to many of the performances. They sit patiently in the back of the room and gather the props after their mother finishes the monologue. And they know all the songs.

As one of the boys packed a black duffel bag with the tousled wig and fake fur coat from the performance, their father smiled and said, "They love it."

The family left Atlanta and moved to Selma about 2 1/2 years ago. "Selma was not a place we had thought about," Denise Dukes said, "but it's been a blessing, spiritually."

Denise quickly found a job as a teacher, and Roger has been working as a counselor with children. But she was able to quit teaching a few months ago, and now focuses on the ministry full-time. Roger Dukes hopes to be able to join her in a full-time effort.

Now, Denise Dukes has expanded her focus to include teaching workshops. In a biblical dance and drama workshop, she teaches a small group — no more than 30 — how to take scripture to put together plays in a "fun and informative" format.

"The biblical drama allows kids to learn the word of God without realizing it. It's fun, and they can relate to it," she said. She also teaches etiquette workshops for children.

As word of the ministry spreads — she was helped by an appearance on the Trinity Broadcast Network in March — the couple are convinced they're doing the right thing.

"For me, I just totally believe in what she's doing," Roger Dukes said. "She has my 100 percent support."

In an emotionally charged performance, Denise Dukes acts the role of Rebecca in "Choices," a one-woman play she conceived and produced.

"Choices" focuses on the difficult life of Rebecca, an 18-year-old girl who endures tragedy but ultimately returns to her faith in God. The drama includes interpretive dance and a capella song.

Photos by Lloyd Gallman Advertiser

go!

TODAY

- **"Twelve Angry Men"** 7:30 p.m. today. Wetumpka Depot Theatre, Main Street in downtown Wetumpka. $8 advance, $10 at door. 567-2026.
- **Chris McCarthy Band and Bulletproof Marshmallows** 8 p.m. today. Off The Wagon. $5. 263-0182.
- **Dead Like Dallas, Mimk and Weak Music 4 Thomas** 9 p.m. today. Papa T's Sports Bar. $5. 270-1441.

▸ More GO! calendar 4D

Page edited and designed by Stephanie Wilson

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Justification often comes from a higher power

Al Perkins

ALONG THE WAY

In the olden days, before computer-generated paste-ups, newspapers were put together by pouring hot lead through a keyboard mechanism that formed letters on little lines (Linotype) which, when cooled, were placed in a metal frame on a heavy, flat surface called a stone. The frame encompassed two pages of the paper. (For some reason, the man who put it all together was called a "Printer's Devil," but that's another story for another time.)

Following a diagram, the P.D. would place the type tiles on the stone inside the frame until it was completely filled. He then began the tedious process of making it all fit tightly and securely by adding little strips of metal where needed and rearranging other elements (headlines, pictures, etc.) until it was all snug. This process was known as justification, and was extremely important. If the type was not fully justified and locked down when the frame was lifted onto the press, the whole thing would collapse into a jumbled pile, the newspaper nightmare known as pied type. Justification was essential.

The word has a variety of meanings. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary lists the newspaper usage with the third definition: "to adjust or arrange exactly." That's what the P.D. does to justify the page.

Another definition includes vindication, a form of proof that an act or statement is right or reasonable. (The outcome justifies my having done this.)

Webster also indicates that justification is the act, process, or state of being justified by God. It also says that it judges, regards, or treats as righteous and worthy of salvation those who are justified. In other words, justification makes right that which isn't.

This is a familiar theme in the Bible, with more than 40 specific references. Job had a tough time with this concept. He had been afflicted with a series of disasters that would have driven a lesser man over the edge. His three friends (?), Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz spent 28 chapters trying to convince him that his own sins were responsible for his troubles. But Job knew better and countered their arguments with an attempt at self-justification. "Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be vindicated." (Job 13:18 Revised Standard Version)

Job's justification came, not from his own protestations of innocence, but from God, in response to Job's confession: "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." (Job 42:3 RSV)

Job learned that he did not, and could not, earn favor with God; it was given to him as a free gift. This understanding provided one of the key factors in the Reformation theology of Martin Luther — justification by faith alone. "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24 RSV)

Sometimes our lives seem like pied type, a mess beyond measure. It helps to remember that God loves us anyway and justifies us just because He loves us.

Al Perkins is an Episcopal priest who lives in Montgomery.

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