

# ENTERTAINMENT

## School Daze director Spike Lee speaks out

by C.G. Reynolds

staff writer

When I was first approached to interview celebrated filmmaker Spike Lee, I thought "great, no problem, I'll watch *She's Gotta Have It*, (his first highly acclaimed film of a sexually confused young woman's choice among three very different lovers) it'll be solid, nothing to worry about." Well, three days and a trip to California later, I still only had the barest bones of an interview. After all, what does one ask a cult legend-in-the-making? The night before the interview I viewed, for the first time, *She's Gotta Have It*, and was soothed a little by this insight into the man's work. The next morning, however, I was again in a frenzy of despair over the

few meager questions I had come up with, and was considering using the Barbara Walters staple: "If you could be a tree...". When I got to the office, I ransacked Chris' box, looking for some clue to Spike's new film, *School Daze*. I uncovered a press kit on the said movie and feverishly poured through it with just minutes to go before he was to phone the office from New York.

What I found in the press kit was that Spike is a man who is passionate about making significant films about black people. He first came to the attention of the public in 1986 with the release of *She's Gotta Have It*, netting him the Prix de Jeunesse Award as the Best New Director at the Cannes Film Festival. He was born in Atlanta in 1957, and mov-

ed to Brooklyn when he was still a child. He majored in mass communications at Morehouse College in Atlanta, where his interest in film was accelerated and where *School Daze* takes place. He went on to attend New York University's graduate film school, where he made his first features. During the shoot for *School Daze*, four Atlanta colleges, including Morehouse, disallowed production because of concern over the depiction of black colleges. Spike employs various prejudices (vs. sex, color, youth, etc.) and *School Daze* is the first modern film to use more than 60 black actors in prominent black roles, and having more than two-thirds of the crew made up of women and minorities. He uses

that set-up to his advantage, as he can develop these people into people he can work with that have the same goals and aspirations.

I began to be flooded with all kinds of inspiration and had just begun to rework the framework of the interview when the phone rang. My heart skipped a beat as I realized my questions had not yet crystalized in my mind. I was going to have to do this one from the Edge. As I spoke the name of the paper into the phone, I wondered if I could pull it off.

SPIKE: Is this Chris Cox or Chad Reynolds?

YELL: Yeah, this is Chad.

SPIKE: Hey, Chad, this is Spike.

YELL: Hey Spike, how's it goin'? How do you feel?

SPIKE: Alright.  
YELL: That's good. Okay, I guess I'll start with the obligatory question: How do you feel about being labelled "The Black Woody Allen?"

SPIKE: I don't like it.

YELL: I see. Could you

elaborate on that?

SPIKE: Uh...no, not on that particular question.

YELL: Well, alright, I can understand that. How about this: When you debuted, were you well accepted by the New York film scene?

SPIKE: Yeah, very well. Maybe not so much in the press, but the film community's cool.

YELL: Speaking of the press. I heard Rex Reed really came after *School Daze* in his review. What's your opinion of Rex?

SPIKE: Well, Rex Reed is not the best film critic in the world. I just heard about it, I didn't see [the review] myself.

YELL: So it didn't hurt as much that way?

SPIKE: Naw, it didn't hurt. It's just criticism, I didn't take it personally.

YELL: Okay. Other critics have come out against *School Daze* because, in their opinion, it is a racist depiction of life at a black college. What do you think of that?

SPIKE: It's not racist, it's just about the divisions

among black people, how there exists the kind of racism dependent on how black you are.

YELL: I see. Uh, in *She's Gotta Have It*, you used a real mix of comedy and drama, going to extremes in either direction. Do you do the same thing in *School Daze*?

SPIKE: Yeah, it's like that a lot more in *School Daze*, a lot more. Plus the musical part.

YELL: That's right, there's dancing and stuff in this, right? Kinda like *Dirty Dancing*?

SPIKE: (laughs) Well, I wouldn't go that far..

YELL: Okay, let's see...oh, okay. We're going to deviate a little here. What kind of movies do you like? Who's your favorite director?

SPIKE: I like all different types of movies. I'd say my favorite directions would have to be Martin Scorsese and Jim Jarmusch.

YELL: Jim Jarmusch, I don't think I can place him. What has he done?

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