

ENTERTAINMENT

'American History X' aptly chronicles hatred's legacy

By Tammy D. McMahan
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Hatred has an unenviable legacy: death, destruction and chaos. It also produces change, as evidenced in American History X, a film about the journey of a young Neo-Nazi skinhead who eventually renounces racism.

This film is about two brothers, Derek and Danny Vinyard and begins with the elder brother, Derek (Edward Norton), and his transformation from an intelligent, thoughtful teen-ager to race-baiting, malevolent, skinhead. He later renounces racism.

Through a series of flashbacks, Derek learns the primary source of his hatred: the death of his father by African-Americans. His also recalled how his father's virulently

racist rhetoric poisoned his mind.

Derek is befriended by a shadowy white supremacist named Cameron Alexander (Stacy Keach). He becomes lieutenant of Alexander's group, recruiting listless youth eager for a sense of belonging and teaching them to blame their problems and the world's illson people who are unlike them.

Derek is a fiery and fearless leader, equally powerful in action and rhetoric. His mother and liberal-minded sister aren't spared from his vitriolic outbursts. His brother Danny (Edward Furlong) idolizes him.

Derek's life changes after he is sent to prison for shooting two black teens who attempted to steal his car to avenge an earlier racist exchange on a basketball court. Prison

softens Derek, who upon his release, is intent on turning his impressionable brother Danny away from the path of hatred.

On the day of Derek's release, Danny is sent to Principal Sweeney (Avery Brooks) to discuss his favorable review of Hitler's "Mein Kampf." Sweeney gives him a one-on-one course dubbed "American History X." His first assignment is to write about his brother Derek.

The journey the brothers take the next two days is both a painful recollection of hatred's legacy.

Norton is excellent in portraying Derek, at times mesmerizing the audience, at other times, repelling it. His eloquence made it easy for him to convince his stewards that his

cause was just and that violence is a legitimate means to a "political" end.

Norton is equally convincing as a repentant ex-felon who is haunted by his past and fears retribution but is committed to saving his brother.

Though Avery Brooks is given little screen time, he ably portrays the moralistic Sweeney. The character possesses hard-driving idealism, intelligence and sensitivity. While repulsed by what Danny stands for and Derek stood for, he is determined to save them. During a powerful scene in the prison when he reveals his one-time hatred for Whites, Brooks shines.

American History X is a sobering, impressive film.

Alvin Ailey dance theater celebrates 40th anniversary

By Mary Campbell

NEW YORK (AP) — Dancers past and present of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater came together to celebrate the 40th anniversary season of the company with a concert of rousing song and dance.

The celebration last week night at the City Center was a tribute to Ailey, founder of the modern dance company,

Smith

(Continued from Page 8)

Not only does Smith have a potential blockbuster in movie theaters, he recently signed a deal with Universal Pictures to start his own production company, Overbrook Entertainment. At the same time, he is eyeing film projects with Whitney Houston and a possible biopic on Muhammad Ali.

Smith also hasn't forgotten his music career. He has a hit album on the chart, "Big Willie Style." It is his first album in years and a best seller. He also won a Grammy this year for best rap solo performance for the single, "Men in Black."

At first Smith was unsure if he should return to the rap arena. A little nudge by someone close to him, however, changed his mind.

"I was really nervous about the big change that hip hop had undertaken, when that whole gangsta rap thing took over the mainstream of hip hop. It was just dark, and the darkness was putting out my light a little bit," he said. "Jada kind of convinced me to go ahead and make the records that I wanted to make and make people have to deal with me rather than me have to deal with them."

Jada is fellow actor and wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, who in July gave birth to a baby boy, Jaden. He is Pinkett Smith's first child and

whodied in 1989. The benefit evening, including a banquet, raised more than \$1.3 million for the company.

The concert opened with "Ancestral Homage to Alvin Ailey," of work of African percussion and West Indian-rooted dance choreographed by Reginald Yates.

It ended with "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham" from the

"Revelations" sequence, the most popular of Ailey's 79 works. Linda Denise-Evans, showing beautiful poise, and Edward Franklin, performed "Fix Me, Jesus," a dance that depicts them opening themselves to their religion.

Dudley Williams, senior member of the company, conveyed worship through movement in "I Wanna Be Ready," with Kenny

doom a relationship, and they know it will take a lot of work to keep it strong.

"Nothing you love was easy to attain, and we're very clear and very realistic about our situation," he said. "We have a very realistic outlook on the world. It makes it so much easier when you deal with what's real, rather than dealing with what you wish was real. It's so much easier when you're with someone who is willing to accept reality rather than create this fantasy."

Of course, a little humor doesn't hurt either.

"Jada said to me the other day, 'You are one of the biggest movie stars in the world. You just sold 8 million albums with your record. You are at the peak of your career and you got married.' I said 'Yeah?'"

Jada's reply: "That was just stupid."

Then Smith laughs, flashing that killer smile.

Lattimore singing.

"Sinner Man" was danced by Uri Sands, Matthew Rushing and Troy O'Neil Powell, conveying the terror and futility panic of trying to hide from God.

Performers ranged from Monique Masiah, 11, who sang, to veterans like Donna Wood Sanders and Clive Thompson, who came out of retirement for the big night. Guest soloists included Harolyn Blackwell, Phoebe Snow, Ella Mitchell and Billy

Porter.

A lavish new production of Geoffrey Holder's 1968 "The Prodigal Prince," a ballet about the Haitian painter Hector Hyppolite, was dedicated to former dancers Miguel Godreau and James Truitte, who have died.

Among those giving speeches were actors Robert DeNiro and Angela Bassett, and Judith Jamison, artistic director of the company since Ailey's death, who recalled that Ailey's aim had always

been "to change your heart and spirit so when you leave the theater you leave elevated and different."

Ailey, who is credited with putting a black American stamp on modern dance, was born into poverty in Rogers, Texas, in 1931 and grew up picking cotton and doing domestic work for a living.

At 12 he moved to Los Angeles and discovered ballet on a junior high school trip to a performance by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

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