

ENTERTAINMENT

'Summer of Sam' lacking in depth

Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

During 1977, the city of New York was held hostage by a serial killer who struck in the dead of night. Using a .44 caliber Magnum revolver, David Berkowitz would prey on unsuspecting couples, kissing in secluded areas, and on young women traveling the streets alone.

Composite sketches of the murderer, who referred to himself as The Son of Sam, were splashed across the front page of every tabloid. And the killer himself wrote explanatory letters to reporter Jimmy Breslin who published them in the New York Daily News. These musings of a madman provoked hysteria throughout the town as people altered their dress, travel, work and recreation patterns to evade him. For instance, because it was believed that The Son of Sam preferred brunettes, many women took to dyeing their hair blonde.

This is the backdrop against which Summer of Sam is set. Directed by New York Knicks mascot Spike Lee, the movie focuses on the panic in an Italian-American neighborhood in the Bronx where a pair of Berkowitz's victims were slaughtered. So, this is, in effect, a crossover film for Mr. Lee, if there is such a thing in movies. Heretofore, Mr. Lee's work has featured singularly black themes, his best work being "Four Little Girls," for which he deserved an Oscar for Best Documentary.

The erstwhile director somehow assembled the most impressive cast of the year for this project including Tony Award-nominee John Leguizamo (for Freak), Oscar-winner Mira Sorvino (Mighty Aphrodite), Tony

Award-winner Anthony LaPaglia (for A View From the Bridge), two-time Tony Award-winner Bebe Neuwirth (for Chicago and Sweet Charity), Tony-Award-winner Patti LuPone (for Evita), and veteran actor Ben Gazzara. Jimmy Breslin enjoys a brief wraparound role as himself, while director Spike Lee cameos as a tv reporter.

Unfortunately, the screenplay, written by actors Victor Colicchio and Michael Imperioli in association with Spike Lee, is severely lacking in depth. The movie opens with the pretentious tag line



SPIKE LEE from the 1950s tv series, The Naked City. "There are 8 million tales in the naked city and this is just one of them," Jimmy Breslin begins. But this is no documentary, not even a docudrama. I left unsatisfied because the film never told the Son of Sam story.

We never meet or learn anything about any of the victims. We just get to see them blown away in grisly detail. What a tribute. And we get precious little about David Berkowitz most of which is made-up. Berkowitz is portrayed as the most easily identifiable nut case who ever walked the earth. Unemployed, the movie killer spends his day banging his

(See Sam, Page 9)

Rapper DMX arrested on weapons charge

TEANECK, N.J. (AP) — Rapper DMX is working on his rap sheet again.

Police arrested the star, whose real name is Earl Simmons, and his wife, Tashera, on weapons charges yesterday.

A semiautomatic handgun and 14 pit bulls were seized.

Police searched their home after the shooting Sunday of Simmons' uncle and manager, Ray Copeland. Copeland was wounded in the foot. Police refused to say whether Simmons is a suspect.

Simmons was freed on \$50,000 bail. He was already out on bail in Yonkers, N.Y., for allegedly attacking a man he claimed was bothering his wife.

Simmons pleaded innocent to the latest charges.

'Wild, Wild West' fun, but needed more punch

Tammy D. McMahan
Sentinel-Voice

In the summer, I expect lots of not-so-great films filled with macho men, car chases, gun battles and too many special effects. However, I looked forward to the action-adventure comedy *Wild, Wild West* because actors Will Smith, Kevin Kline and Kenneth Branagh made for a can't-miss ensemble that would do justice to the 1960's television series of the same name. I figured director Barry Sonnenfeld would deliver as he did another Smith movie, *Men in Black*.

I was wrong. The movie was enjoyable at times but the acting, dialogue and plot were disappointing.

The movie takes us on a wild ride with the suave Jim West (Will Smith) and the cerebral Artemus Gordon (Kevin Kline), both of whom are secret U.S. government agents. The agents are determined to foil the plans of Dr. Arliss Loveless (Kenneth Branagh) who has kidnapped several top scientists who are forced to construct a seemingly undefeatable war machine in the shape of an 80-foot



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

Will Smith (right) teams with Oscar-winner Kevin Kline to defeat a madman.

tall mechanical tarantula. With the machine, Loveless intends to overthrow the federal government.

I'll give you the good news first. The movie has some laugh-out-loud moments. When President Grant describes Smith's character as a follower of the "shoot first, shoot later, shoot some more and when everybody's dead, ask a question or two" philosophy, the audience howled.

During a sequence in which the characters portrayed by Smith and Kline are sporting metal,

magnetized neck collars, courtesy of Dr. Loveless, the verbal jabs are simply hilarious.

The special effects were neat and believable. Here, you have eye-catching trains, tanks, fly machines and even billiard balls that could have been the product of nineteenth century scientific know-how.

Now for the bad news. Smith and Kline never really clicked. The movie suffered terribly because of the lack of chemistry. Furthermore, Smith provides a decent performance as Mr. Supercool of the 1860's, but he comes across as much too

modern even in a film that winks at reality.

Kline was mildly entertaining, but he lacked spark and he didn't put a new spin on the brainy inventor/adventurer role.

Loveless is too hammy at times, but he is memorable. Branagh doesn't just chew the scenery, he takes big bites as the never-say-die, Hitlerian former Confederate general.

Perhaps, the acting was lackluster due to the weak dialogue and plot. Even the edgier dialogue (See Review, Page 14)

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