

'Love Stinks' pick of summer film comedy litter

Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice
This has been a terrific year for comedies, circa "Analyze This," "Rushmore," "Notting Hill," "Austin Powers," "South Park," "American Pie," "Mickey Blue Eyes" and "Bowfinger."

But none of these delivers the knockout punch of "Love Stinks," pound-for-pound, the funniest film of the year.

Why all the boxing metaphors? Because Love Stinks is as much a death match a' la Glenn Close versus Michael Douglas (Fatal Attraction) as it is an old-fashioned romantic romp, a' la Kate Hepburn versus Spencer Tracy.

And that's wherein the charm of this battle of the sexes lies, in its vacillating between mercenary mayhem and frivolous frolic. Even now, there's almost ecstasy in my face as I write.

Love Stinks marks the debut of Independent Artists, a small production company

with big potential, judging from this initial public offering. Kudos to writer/director Jeff Franklin, the veteran tv director who created the hit series Full House and Hangin' With Mr. Cooper.

Franklin's storyline is sophisticated and unpredictable, his humor is uproarious but not sophomoric, and his characters are crisp but not caricatures. Such a refreshingly novel film probably had to get made entirely outside of the Hollywood studio system.

Instead of turning to stock box-office stars, director Franklin tapped a quartet of moonlighters who have made their name outside of the movies: super-model Tyra Banks (Higher Learning), MTVeejay Bill Bellamy (Love Jones), NBC's French Stewart (3rd Rock From the Sun) and singer/songwriter Bridgette Wilson (I Know What You Did Last Summer) a relative newcomer. Along for the ride are television's

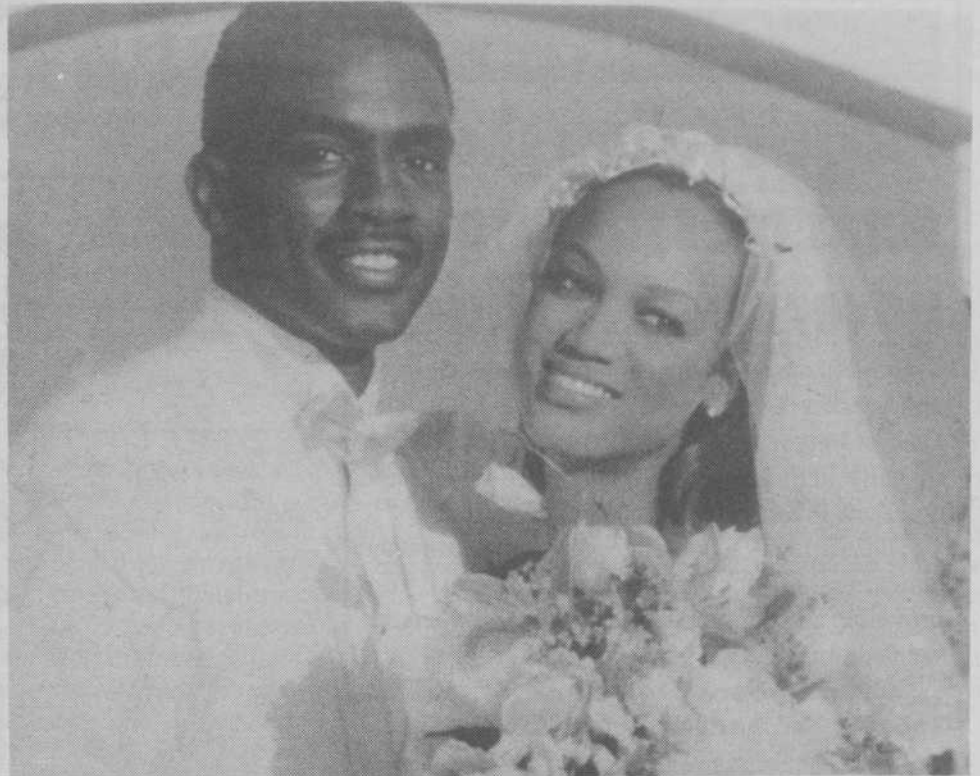
Tiffani-Amber Thiessen and Jason Bateman.

The premise is familiar enough. Best man Seth (Stewart) and bridesmaid Chelsea (Ms. Wilson) meet at the wedding of Larry (Bellamy) and Holly (Banks). And it's love at first sight, as they execute an inquisitive pas-de-deux, spurred on by the newlyweds.

Holly helps her best friend set the bait for Seth, with marriage as Chelsea's unspoken goal, while Larry's prodding of his best friend is a more carnal concern.

A few very quick dates and several compromising positions later, they're involved. Chelsea is determined to build a relationship on the guilt of one night of passion. Confirmed bachelor Seth is hesitant but no match for a woman whose biological clock is ticking like thunder in her ears.

"I finally found a nice guy who is ready to settle down," Chelsea misreads him.



Bill Bellamy, (left), and Tyra Banks tie the knot in the summer comedy 'Love Stinks.'

"Whatever it takes, I'm going to marry that man," confides in Holly.

Steamroller Chelsea, easy on the eyes but hard on the nerves, subsequently moves in with Seth and begins

dictating every aspect of his life.

This strategy, of course, backfires into resentment. The conflict, which is the sum and substance of the flick, escalates from sniping to

playing the half-dozen into all out war.

Told in a series of vivid flashbacks from the perspective of Larry, as omniscient narrator, the film is a witty delight.

Rapper's lawyer softens stance on racism claim

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Master P's attorney has backed off accusations that the rapper and his entourage were denied membership to an exclusive country club because of racism.

Attorney Edwin Hawkins was quoted in the current issue of Time magazine saying that the denial by the Country Club of Louisiana was "just plain racism."

Hawkins softened his stance somewhat in an interview with The (Baton Rouge) Advocate on Monday. "I don't want to go as far as I did in Time magazine," he said.

But he said he continues to believe that Master P's group was treated differently because they are black. "Whatever I said that day, I meant in my heart," he said.

Lynn Juban, president of the club's board of directors, denied that Master P, whose real name is Percy Miller, was the target of racism. "We have minority members here," he said. "This is the most open club I've ever seen."

Master P, who owns the successful No Limit Records, paid \$2.6 million for five houses in the gated community beside the club and applied for membership.



MASTER P

One neighbor is former Gov. Edwin Edwards, who said he sees no reason why Master P shouldn't be allowed to join the club.

"He must be one hell of a golfer and they don't want to be put to shame by his golf score," Edwards quipped.

Martin Lawrence still recovering from weight-loss induced coma

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. (AP) — Martin Lawrence was breathing without a ventilator as he continued his recovery from a coma triggered by a weight-loss jog in summer heat.

The actor, who had been near death after suffering heat exhaustion and hyperthermia Aug. 22, was "alert and responding to commands," according to a statement from his publicist, Kim Jones.

"He's doing great," she said Tuesday. The actor's prognosis was changed from guarded to good, and

Lawrence was listed in serious but stable condition.

Lawrence, 34, was trying to lose weight for a movie role when he went running near his home in 100-degree weather. His girlfriend found him collapsed on the doorstep and called 911.

Doctors at Los Robles Regional Medical Center had said Lawrence might have to

undergo dialysis to remove excess protein trapped in his kidneys, but Jones said the procedure wasn't necessary.

The actor starred in the Fox TV comedy "Martin" from 1992-96 and has appeared in films including "Life," "Bad Boys" and "Nothing to Lose." His next film, "Blue Streak," opens Sept. 17.

Queen Latifah raps about new talk show

NEW YORK (AP) — A little bit of this, a little bit of that — that's how Queen Latifah describes her new TV talk show.

"We're going to be sort of Oprah-meets-Rosie-meets-Chris Rock," the rapper-actress tells the Sept. 11 issue of TV Guide. "We'll deal with news events, issues and celebrities just doing their own thing."

Queen Latifah, whose real name is Dana Owens, has had a lot on her plate this year. Her book "Ladies First: Revelations of a Strong Woman" was published and she co-stars in the upcoming thriller "The Bone Collector" with Denzel Washington.

Speaking of Washington, the 28-year-old Latifah says she'd like to have him as a guest.

"Denzel is way cooler than people perceive him to be," she said. "I'd love to let him freestyle and rap like he can do."

"Latifah," is scheduled to debut this fall.

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