

## ENTERTAINMENT

## Leading the fight against mediocrity in movies

Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Spike Lee, producer of *The Best Man*, which was unfairly snubbed at Oscar time, has backed another winner in *Love & Basketball*, a bittersweet tale of romance, betrayal and redemption. And in between there's a whole lot of ball. The film stars Omar Epps (*In Too Deep*) and Sanaa Lathan (*The Best Man*) as fiercely competitive next-door neighbors linked since childhood by a dedication to their chosen sport.

By now, you've seen the commercial, it's a story which unfolds over about twenty years but in four quarters like a basketball game. Gym rats Quincy (Mr. Epps) and Monica (Ms. Lathan) lead parallel lives which ultimately complicate when their paths finally intersect at the crossroads of love.

As a child, tomboy Monica never indulged herself in anything feminine, preferring to mix it up on the court with the boys. And she has a scar to prove it, too, left by a gash in a cheek. That disfigurement was the result of a deliberate blacktop shove by Quincy as a youngster in a brutal show of male territoriality. And throughout the film the blemish subtly serves as an ever-constant reminder of an unspoken debt which Quincy must one day pay off.

Writer/director Gina

Prince-Blythewood makes her feature film debut, here, although she has previously written for the television series *A Different World* and *South Central*. Gina is to be commended for creating such a complex pair of vulnerable characters who face the full panoply of life issues on their journeys from adolescence into adulthood.

My screening was not restricted to film critics but was overflowing with homeys who had won passes on a rap-oriented radio station. I knew enough to sit near the front, because it is acceptable behavior among inner-city blacks to shout back at the screen. From my vantage point, I got the best of both worlds, the full impact of the movie as intended, plus the hilarious, improvised dialogue and snappy retorts of audience members who ought to be stand-up comics.

And I believe the rousing round of applause at film's end was as much due to the spontaneous outbursts as to the film itself. Because I can't honestly judge the movie independent of the distracting chatter of my experience, I feel obligated to share some of those choice tidbits.

1) On screen, a telephone rings. "Hello," hollered from a wiseguy.

2) Woman slaps man in tense scene. "Slap her back!" somebody yelled.

3) After a close-up of supermodel Tyra Banks,



Omar Epps and Sanaa Lathan in "Love &amp; Basketball"

"Forehead!" is shouted.

4) A conversation in Spanish is greeted with, "Can we get some subtitles?"

5) A black woman showing off her lighter-skinned newborn warrants, "She married a white man!"

6) A tender moment in the film's penultimate scene is disrupted by, "This is gonna make me cry!"

7) A woman seducing an engaged man is warned, "He's got a fiancee!"

8) A technical flaw which caused a distracting green mark to appear briefly on the screen is assailed by, "That line is sickening."

9) A bad hair day gets,

"Peasy-ass braids!"

10) After a makeover, "I don't like her like that."

11) After a devastating knee injury, "Now, the Lakers are gonna cut his ass!"

12) As a woman stares wistfully at a picture of her child, "Look at that ugly-ass baby on the wall."

Etcetera.

I loved both shows, the one on the screen, the one in the theater. And I honestly couldn't tell you which one was better.

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG-13 for mild profanity, brief nudity, a scene of male on female violence and sexual situations.

## Ice-T helps pal win release

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. (AP) — Rap singer Ice-T helped an old high school pal win release from federal prison while the man awaits trial.

Tony Jake was freed on bail from Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary on last Wednesday in part because he's got a \$3,000-a-month job lined up as one of Ice-T's assistant managers.

While the judge let Jake take the job, he required him to wear an electronic monitoring anklet and fulfill several other bail conditions.

Jake and Ice-T, whose real name is Tracy Marrow, have been friends since their high school days in California.

Jake was convicted by a jury of obstruction of justice in connection with a murder and bribery case, but has been granted a new trial because of flawed jury instructions.

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KAM'S KAPSULES  
Weekly film previews

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**The Big Kahuna.** Film adaptation of Roger Rueff's play *Hospitality Suite*. Danny DeVito and Oscar-winner Kevin Spacey as industrial lubricant salesman perfecting sales pitches in a hotel room in Wichita, Kansas. And the Wichita salesman, is still on the line.

**Bossa Nova.** (In Portuguese & English with subtitles) Romantic comedy with Spielberg ex Amy Irving as a widowed American school teacher who finds love in Rio with a local lawyer whose wife just left him. Directed by Irving's new beau, Bruno Barreto (Donna Flor and Her Two Husbands). Blame it on the Macarena.

**Committed.** Comic road vehicle for comely Heather Graham (Bowfinger, Austin Powers) as an abandoned New York newlywed determined to track down her hubby, holed-up with a honey in El Paso.

**The Flintstones: In Viva Rock Vegas.** Cast overhauled for prehistoric prequel despite \$350 million first take. Gone are John Goodman, Rick Moranis, Rosie O'Donnell, Halle Berry, Elizabeth Taylor and Jonathan Winters, only to be replaced by Mark Addy, Jane Krakowski, Kristen Johnston and Stephen Baldwin. Yabba-dabba-don't!

**Frequency.** "I hear dead people." Compelling sci-crime drama starring Dennis Quaid as cop who contacts his long-deceased dad via short wave radio. Sounds hokey, but trust me, it's an edge-of-the-seat nail-biter with a tear-jerker of a payoff.

**The Idiots.** (In Danish with subtitles) Three Stooges-style satire about a Copenhagen cult of anti-social anarchists who fake mental retardation to trash restaurants, monkey-wrench assembly lines and even fornicate in public. How do you say, 'I'll moider you!' in Danish?

**The Last September.** Explosive, 1920s Ireland serves as the setting for magically delicious, Anglo-Irish love triangle with lovely lassie torn between Brit soldier and renegade freedom fighter. 'Always after me lucky bombs'.

**Time Code.** Earthquake hits LA. Oscar-nominated director Mike Figgis' off-beat experiment, filmed simultaneously in a single take on four locations. Non-stop 93 minutes unfolds in real-time, and looks it.

**Where the Heart Is.** (Not to be confused with Paul Newman's *Where the Money Is*) A knocked-up Natalie Portman gets dumped at an Oklahoma Wal-Mart by her sperm donor beau on the way to California from Tennessee. Based on the Billie Letts novel about a 7 months pregnant 17 year-old truant who's superstitious about 7s. Curiously changed to frightened by 5s for the film.

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## Master P still has hoop dreams

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — Cut by two NBA teams, rapper Master P refuses to give up on his professional basketball dreams. The 29-year-old entertainment mogul, whose real name is Percy Miller, has signed on with the Atlantic City Seagulls of the United States Basketball League. The team opens a 30-game schedule Saturday at Convention Hall.

"Yeah, I do the music thing and the other things, but right now my job is to play basketball and help this team," he said Thursday. "Basketball has been a big part of my life. When I get on the court, it's Percy Miller, and the Master P thing is over."

Miller, who is 6-foot-4 inches tall and weighs 200 pounds, has tried out before. In 1998, he was cut by the Charlotte Hornets in training camp and played briefly afterward in the Continental Basketball Association.

## Def Jam founder adds retail store

NEW YORK (AP) — Def Jam Records co-founder Russell Simmons is adding a retail store to his growing list of ventures outside the music arena.

The planned 14,000-square-foot flagship store in Harlem will carry Simmons' own Phat Farm clothing line, as well as that of hip-hop mogul Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs, Polo and Versace. But it also will offer items ranging from home furnishings and jewelry to pagers, he said.

"It's a megastore. It's a lifestyle store," Simmons told the *New York Post*. And it is "the first of what should be many, many stores."

The rap music impresario said he is in the final stages of lining up a lease for the property.