

Road show packed with stars, laughs

By Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

If you've ever seen *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), then you already know the basic plot of *Rat Race*, a pot o' gold comedy directed by Jerry Zucker.

If you remember the original, *Mad, Mad* featured an ensemble cast of kooky characters in a zany, winner-take-all, cross-country race to be the first to find the buried treasure.

Well, even though the highly successful *Mad, Mad* was nominated for a half-dozen Academy awards, winning one, that didn't discourage Zucker from more or less mounting a bald-faced remake.

While *Rat Race's* storyline ain't all that different, it's certainly an improvement upon an admittedly laudable antecedent, putting its own insane spin on the avaricious antics.

Jerry Zucker, a comic genius by anybody's standards, has a most impressive body of work to show after a long, Hollywood career spent mostly in collaboration with his brother/producer, David. Zucker directed such comedy classics as *Airplane*, *Naked Gun* and *Ruthless People*. This versatile talent also made *Ghost*, the bittersweet, classic love story which was nominated for five Academy Awards including Best Picture.

Whoopi Goldberg, who won her Oscar for *Ghost*, reunites with Zucker, here, for a relatively lighthearted romp. The cast includes a couple of other Oscar-winners, Cuba Gooding (for Jerry Maguire) and Kathy Bates (for *Misery*). Of historical note is the fact that this is the first time that two African-American Oscar-winners have ever appeared in the same movie together.

Rat Race's veritable cattle call of seasoned funny-men includes stand-up comic Paul Rodriguez, Saturday Night Live alumnus Jon Lovitz, SCTV alum Dave Thomas, along with Brits John 'Fawlty Towers' Cleese and Rowan 'Mr. Bean' Atkinson.

The cast is rounded out with other familiar faces such as bubbly Kathy Najimy, the chubby soprano of *Sister Act I & II* and Dean 'Superman' Cain of TV's *Lois & Clark*. Then there's Seth Green, best known as Scott Evil in *Austin Power's I & II*, Wayne Knight, aka Newman, of TV's *Seinfeld*, and blonde of the moment Amy Smart, star of such recent teensplurts as *Road Trip*, *Outside Providence* and *Varsity Blues*.

Usually, a top-heavy production such as this gets bogged down with so many luminaries on the set. But director Zucker must be credited with having a knack for keeping the egos in check while getting the most out of each performer. The premise is simple enough: Las Vegas casino owner Donald Sinclair (Mr. Cleese) comes up with a new game for his high-stakes gamblers ever in need of a bigger thrill.

They can place wagers on a *Rat Race* where humans are the rats and the cheese is \$2 million in cash.

Bettors must guess which of the six randomly-selected participants will be the first to make it from Vegas to Silver City, New Mexico where the loot is located.

Each combatant is given a key to the locker where the duffel bag stuffed with money is hidden.

And there's only one rule in this 'winner take all' contest: There are no rules!

Trading very-heavily in stunts, sight gags and slapstick, we soon learn how greed brings out the worst in each of these colorful contestants. Enrico Pollini (Mr. Atkinson) is a narcoleptic, accented Italian who enlists the aid of Zack (Mr. Knight) an on-duty ambulance driver. Owen (Mr. Gooding) hijacks a bus of Lucille Ball impersonators after he gets dumped in the desert by Gus (Mr. Rodriguez), an angry cabbie.

Meanwhile, Vera (Ms. Goldberg) gets bad directions from an ill-meaning squirrel lady (Kathy Bates), and the Pear family (Mr. Lovitz, Ms. Najimy and kids) get mired in their own mini-van mess.

And there's much more, all of it marked by over-the-top mayhem. The movie is more-or-less a series of separate skits, most of which work, some of which don't, with the entire cast appropriately assembled at the beginning and again at the end.

Overall, a rather sumptuous summer surprise.

Very good (3 stars). Rated PG-13 for sexual references, crude humor, partial nudity and adult language.

Gladys Knight to perform at Sam's Town Live

Legendary star Gladys Knight will be performing next weekend at Sam's Town Live! on Friday and Saturday, August 24 and 25, starting at 8 p.m. both nights.

Gladys has been performing since her early childhood. She, with her brothers and a couple of cousins, formed what became known as Gladys Knight and The Pips. Their first album came out when she was only 16 years old.

Some of the group's most memorable hits are: "Heard It Through The Grapevine," "Friendship Train," "If I Were Your Woman" and "Midnight Train to Georgia."

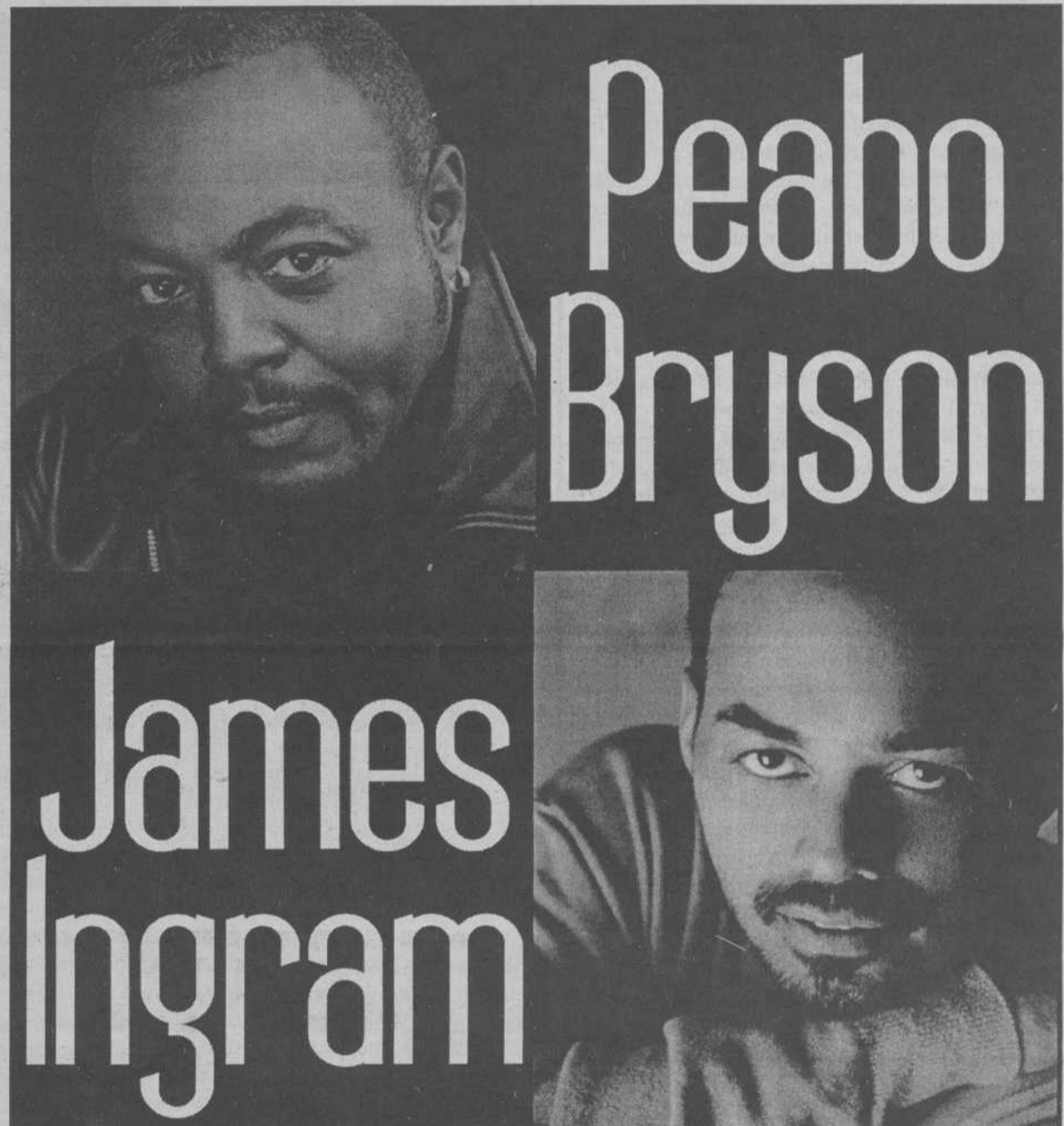
In 1989, Gladys made her world premier as a solo artist in Las Vegas, and her tremendous success continued as she moved in an easy listening, adult contemporary direction. Her albums were filled with songs that are testaments to

love, strength and truth.

Gladys also made a few television appearances, on shows such as "Benson," "The Jeffersons," and the HBO special, "Sisters in The Name of Love," which she produced. In 1992, she starred in the play, "Madam Lily," and had roles in the films, "An Enemy among Us" and "Desperado."

Gladys received a star on the "Hollywood Walk of Fame" in 1995. Gladys Knight and The Pips were inducted into the Rock Hall of Fame the next year, and into the Rhythm and Blues Hall of Fame in 1998.

Tickets for next weekend's performances start at \$44.95, and are available now at Sam's Town Live!, online at Tickets.com, or by calling 888-464-2468.



This Saturday August 18

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