



Though critics have chided "Head of State," which stars Chris Rock, left, and Bernie Mac, audiences love it, making it last weekend's top money-grossing movie in America.

Chris Rock makes disappointing directorial debut as 'Head of State'

By Kam Williams

Don't let the slap-happy commercial fool you. When you see those silly snippets of this "1st black president" comedy, you might be tempted to think that Chris Rock might have finally figured out how to bring his irreverent brand of humor to the big screen. Think something else. There's no evidence of the caustic comic's brilliance anywhere in this lame collection of lousy skits masquerading as cutting-edge social satire.

Rock has encountered difficulties trying to translate the magic of his stand-up act to the cinema before. Anybody remember his nightmarish appearances in Bad Company (2002), Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back (2001), Nurse Betty (2000), Dogma (1999) and Osmosis Jones (2001), to name a few?

Well, he can't point fingers this time, because not

only did he star in the film, he also wrote, directed, and produced Head of State.

Even though Rock takes a writing credit, the stale storyline represents a thinly veiled revision of Dave (1993), in much the same way that Down to Earth (2001) was essentially Heaven Can Wait (1978) in blackface.

The thumbnail sketch of the plot reads as follows. Washington, DC Alderman Mays Gilliam (Rock) is plucked from obscurity as his party's candidate for president after the original nominee perishes in a plane crash.

The crude Mays, in turn, picks his uncouth brother Mitch (Bernie Mac) as his running mate, and the two serve as fodder for all sorts of fish-out-of-water scenarios. Mays plays DJ at a sedate, black-tie affair while oafish Mitch makes a Pigmeat Markham-style fool of himself by not knowing what a

simple thing like NATO is. In fact, the movie only has two types of jokes: black people trying to act white and white people trying to act black.

I don't consider the idea of an African-American President to be so ludicrous in and of itself. Nor do I think that blacks are uncultured aliens who behave like buffoons whenever in civilized company. Nor do I find white people exhibiting rhythm such a rarity that I have to laugh.

Remember, in this topsyturvy world, gangsta' rapper Eminem is white, while our Secretary of State, Colin Powell, is black. Puzzle that one out and then tell me Head of State still has a viable premise.

A 90-minute waste of celluloid, and in poor taste.

Fair (1 star). Rated PG-13 for profanity, sex and drug references.

BET

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channel to co-produce and finance the daily gal pal show.

"This is a big investment on their part and our part," said Geraldine Laybourne, chairwoman of Oxygen, which will run "Hey Monie" as a weekday series in July.

Meanwhile, others are vying to give BET a run for its audience.

Major Broadcasting Co., best known for airing the football and basketball games of black colleges, has announced plans for a 24-hour news channel aimed at black viewers. Comcast, the nation's largest cable television company, and black-oriented Radio One together are developing a channel that will feature mostly black-oriented entertainment.

"It's not something I'm going to spend a

lot of time worrying about," said Lee, "especially when I haven't seen a programming proposal that looks any different from what BET is."

BET viewer Ken Morris cautiously shares Debra Lee's optimism about the network's new direction.

"At first I was a little upset when Viacom bought them," said the 34-year-old loan processor as he strolled through a Los Angeles shopping mall. "They were a black-owned company and all of a sudden you had this big conglomerate sucking them up."

Then he thought about it more and concluded: "They have a lot more money and maybe they'll pump some more money and get better programming for the network. ... I'm hopeful."

Jazz

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sidered easy listening music with a contemporary flair.

"This type of music won't disturb the politics of the office," said Final Call White House correspondent Askia Muhammad, who also is a jazz historian and radio personality at Pacifica's Washington, D.C., station WPFW.

"As a radio format, it competes with soft rock and other office music. The obvious symbol of smooth jazz is Kenny G. The advertising and promotion of it is him," Muhammad said. "The Black artists that have had success with smooth jazz are the established artists who had audiences of their own who brought a strong following to the station in exchange for additional success and popularity.

"With the help of Broadcast Architecture, "the Smooth Jazz format has shown amazing growth over the past seven years. Its ability to bring ratings success in key adult demos is unsurpassed. With core artists like Kenny G, George Benson, Sade and Anita Baker, Smooth Jazz appeals to multi-cultural listeners."

According to Broadcast Architecture, since 1994, it has assisted more than 20 stations in format flips to smooth jazz. In addition to their ongoing relationships with existing smooth jazz stations, Broadcast Architecture provides a foundation for introducing smooth jazz to new markets.

"Broadcast Architecture is so powerful that they mandate the sound. Their word influences the top markets and the artists' handlers are eager to respond to the ma-

nipulation by Broadcast Architecture. In order to get heard, the artists must provide what Broadcast Architecture is looking for," said Tobin.

"They also influence what artists get paid, concerts and jazz festivals. The concept behind smooth jazz is to have relaxing music. It has to be laid back, relaxing and non-offensive. They'd rather have a non-offensive tune than one that some like and others don't. This is wallpaper music, background sounds. It works for them but not the artists."

Artists who follow the formula provided by Broadcast Architecture are rewarded with airtime explained Tobin. "Airplay is most important, sales are after the fact."

In the hip hop world, artists such as Master P, Cash Money and 50 Cent decided to avoid those control issues.

"Those folks came along and said we're not going to play that game of control. We're going to play outside of the gym," said Tobin.

These artists began to sell, distribute and promote their own music. Thousands of records were sold literally out of the trunks of their cars.

"They get 100 percent of the profits and not the very small percentage that other artists get from their label," said Mr. Tobin. "These artists own their publishing rights, they distribute their own music and the radio stations are coming to them for promotion."

Nisa Islam Muhammad writes for the Final Call