

# Williams steals show in futuristic, animated film

By Kam Williams  
Sentinel-Voice

In 2002, Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha co-directed "Ice Age," a charming animated adventure revolving around several anthropomorphic prehistoric creatures, including a woolly mammoth, a sloth and several saber-toothed tigers.

Now, the ingenious directors have collaborated on another computer-generated family flick, though this tale is set in the future instead of the past, in a world inhabited entirely by robots.

To their credit, the filmmakers assembled an enviable pool of Academy Award-quality talent, including winners Halle Berry ("Monster's Ball"), Jim Broadbent ("Iris"), Mel Brooks ("The Producers"), Dianne Wiest ("Hannah and Her Sisters" and "Bullets over Broadway"), and Robin



"Robots" has an all-star cast of voices, including Oscar winner Halle Berry.

Williams ("Good Will Hunting"), plus nominees James Earl Jones ("The Great White Hope") and Greg Kinnear ("As Good As It Gets").

The movie also features the distinct voices of some well-known character actors like Paul Giamatti, Stanley Tucci, Jennifer Coolidge, Ewan McGregor and Dan Hedaya and the readily recognizable warblings of such

popular, network TV icons as Drew Carey, Amanda Bynes, Al Roker, Jay Leno, Carson Daly, D.L. Hughley, Jamie Kennedy, Conan O'Brien and Terry Bradshaw.

Out of the cacophony of all these colorful accents competing for attention, it is Robin Williams' trademark stream-of-consciousness which emerges as the driving force of the film, in accor-

dance with the latter-day formula for these kiddie cartoons.

In case you haven't noticed, it is now de rigueur in the animated genre that the hero be on an epic journey and accompanied by a scene-stealing, wisecracking sidekick who is given to spouting brainless, but irreverent humorous asides.

"Shrek" had Eddie Murphy as his trash-talking, tag-along donkey. "Finding Nemo" had Ellen DeGeneres as a forgetful tang fish annoying. "The Emperor's New Groove" had bratty bad boy David Spade as an annoying llama. And Billy Crystal performed the same sort of func-

tion in "Monsters Inc." while Will Smith annoyed us to no end in "Shark Tale."

You're likely to enjoy this latest variation on the hackneyed theme to the extent that you're a fan of Williams' sassy brand of comedy. The story starts in tiny Rivet Town where an enterprising boy robot named Rodney Copperbottom (McGregor), inspired by the idealistic notions of his idol, Bigweld (Brooks), bids his parents farewell, and sets out for Robot City, a high-tech megatropolis, expecting to find work as an apprentice at the genius inventor's factory.

What Rodney doesn't know is that greedy Phineas T. Ratchet (Kinnear) has wrested control of the company away from Bigweld, with the intention of unleashing a diabolical plot to maximize profits by no longer manufacturing spare robot parts. A policy of mandatory upgrades instead of repairs will spell certain doom for most of the aging robot kingdom.

Rejected and dejected, Rodney is befriended by Fender (Williams), the motor-mouthed leader of the

Rusties, a renegade gang of misfits who hang out on the outskirts of town. Can these almost obsolete mechanical beings team-up to change the course of history before they all end up on the scrap heap?

Besides a diaper load of potty humor and the incessant Robin Williams riffs, the tykes ought to appreciate the visually-captivating, remarkably realistic, next generation animation. Parents will have to be satisfied by the comparatively-sophisticated allusions to such screen classics as "The Wizard of Oz," "Singing in the Rain," "James Bond," "Analyze This," "Jaws" and "Road Trip."

Mercifully, the picture has precious few product placements, an unusual departure from the norm for children's fare. This ad-free approach makes sense, given Robot's overall anti-materialism message.

A breath of fresh air in these crassly commercial times when we've come to expect kiddie flicks to arrive laced with cross promotions and sales pitches.

Very Good (3 stars). Rated PG for mild epithets and suggestive humor

## Tavis Smiley returning to public radio on new show

LOS ANGELES (AP) —Tavis Smiley has found a new public radio home and will begin hosting a weekend discussion show next month.

Smiley, who left National Public Radio in December after a contract dispute, on Thursday announced a deal with Public Radio International to host "The Tavis Smiley Show" and produce other programs.

He will continue to serve as host of his late-night PBS talk show "Tavis Smiley" and is creating a series of prime-time specials for PBS. The first, "American Ascension," is set to air this summer.

Smiley said he missed the daily intellectual stimulation of radio.

"I received as much as I gave," he told The Associated Press. "Just moderating these conversations every day, asking questions every day, I learned as much as the audience did."

Smiley "deserves to be heard on public radio," Eleanor Harris, PRI marketing and distribution chief, said in a statement. Smiley's show reflects PRI's effort to broaden "the range and reach of public radio," she said.

The show, debuting April 29 as two hours of programming intended to air in the Friday-to-Sunday window, will feature newsmakers and regular commentators including Princeton professor Cornel West and former congress-

man J.C. Watts.

In 2002, Smiley became the host of NPR's first Black-oriented show. He left when his contract ended, alleging NPR didn't make his show's renewal a priority and failed to live up to promises to expand marketing efforts.

NPR maintained it was eager to keep Smiley on the air but financially unable to meet his demand for what it characterized as a hefty marketing budget.

Ed Gordon, like Smiley an alumnus of Black Entertainment Television, was hired by NPR as host of the daily "News & Notes with Ed Gordon."

Radio stations can be affiliated with both the PRI and NPR networks, and Smiley said he "fully expects to be on the same number of stations, if not more," than the roughly 90 affiliates he reached with NPR.

His schedule, including TV and book obligations and his nonprofit foundation, makes resumption of a daily radio show difficult now, he said.

Smiley wants to bring other minorities on board with programming produced by his company and distributed by PRI under the new deal.

"I figure I'm not the only person of color who can do this successfully," he said of creating public radio shows.

## Levert indicted on assault charges

CLEVELAND (AP) —A Cuyahoga County grand jury has indicted rhythm & blues artist Gerald Levert on assault charges after a city prosecutor said there wasn't evidence to sustain the charges following a confrontation with police during a traffic stop.


Prosecutor Anthony Jordan said earlier this month that there was no evidence

the singer caused serious physical harm to patrolmen Ronald W. Ross and Daniel Lentz. Levert, 38, was charged with drunken driving, impeding traffic, obstructing police business and resisting arrest.

On Tuesday, a county grand jury indicted Levert on two charges of felonious assault and a charge of obstructing official business.

Police said Levert and a passenger in his car, James Austin Jr. of Canton, intervened when authorities stopped a friend of Levert's for speeding at 12:45 a.m. Feb. 25.


Ross said he hurt his wrist and Lentz said he injured his shoulder while trying to detain Austin. Officials said the officers missed work the day after the confrontation.



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