

Karate film muscles out laughs

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Sing (Stephen Chow) is a small-time, street thug who dreams of joining the ruthless Axe Gang, the much-feared lords controlling Shanghai's underworld in the Thirties. So, in order to prove himself worthy, he tries to extort money out of the denizens of Pig Sty Alley, a tight-knit community in one of the city's worst ghettos.

But instead of capitulating to the bully's intimidation, the hardy locals band together and defend themselves, relying on rusty martial arts skills which haven't been used in years. Their resistance, while initially successful, only leads to Sing's summoning reinforcements, and the real gang arrives for a showdown over control over the town.

This is the basic plot of "Kung Fu Hustle," which reads, at first blush, like an old-fashioned, Hong-Kong chopsocky. However, this bare-bones sketch doesn't offer a hint about what this visually-captivating satire of the genre has to offer in terms of humorous asides, comical stunt sequences, cartoonish



"Kung Fu Hustle" combines the action of traditional martial arts films with comic hilarity.

special effects and clever allusions to a seemingly endless variety of screen classics.

Though it's impossible, at times, to tell whether the picture intends to parody or pay homage, the film features scenes evocative of everything from "The Godfather," to "The Matrix," to "The Seven Samurai," to "Crouching Tiger," "Hidden Dragon," to "The Untouchables," to "The Shining" and beyond.

Part camp, part pure silliness, the over-the-top spoof was brilliantly written and

directed by its star, Stephen Chow ("Shaolin Soccer"). Picture a blend of Bruce Lee, The Three Stooges and Looney Tunes. You are likely to appreciate this film to the extent that you are willing to forget about the laws of gravity and physics, in much the same way one must ignore his or her own commonsense in order to enjoy the average animated action adventure.

For instance, before a character gives chase, he might jump up in the air and spin his feet rapidly before tearing off down the road in a manner reminiscent of

Road Runner. Or, after a thug has his face flattened like a pancake, don't be surprised to see him peel himself off the ground a few seconds later, as if nothing had happened, a la Wile E Coyote.

"Kung Fu Hustle," 99 minutes of inane slapstick skits, seamlessly spliced together and dressed up as an historical drama to fool audiences into thinking they're watching something far more sophisticated. Fooled me.

Excellent (3.5 stars). Rated R for profanity and for graphic stylized, karate and martial arts action.



Rap outfit OutKast has made peace with the activist.

Parks-Outkast feud settled after years

DETROIT (AP) - Rosa Parks and rap duo OutKast have settled a lawsuit in which the civil rights pioneer accused the group of wrongly using her name in a song title, her guardian said Thursday.

OutKast, Sony BMG Music Entertainment and two of the company's units admitted no wrongdoing, but agreed to work on projects "to enlighten today's youth about the significant role Rosa Parks played in making America a better place for all races," Parks' guardian Dennis Archer said in a statement.

Sony BMG attorney Joe Beck said Thursday evening that the defendants were pleased with the settlement.

"We think it will go a long way towards teaching a new generation about Rosa Parks and her accomplishments, and we appreciate Mrs. Parks' and her attorneys' acknowledgment of the First Amendment in protecting (See Lawsuit, Page 15)

Bio offers good tribute to Gibson

Born to Win: The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson

By Frances Clayton Gray and Yannick Rice Lamb

Foreword by Bill Cosby

Afterword by Venus Williams

Wiley Books, 256 pp., illus.

Hardcover, \$24.95

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Review by Kam Williams

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"No Negro player, man or woman, had ever set foot on one of these courts. In many ways, it was an even tougher personal Jim Crow-busting assignment than was Jackie Robinson's when he first stepped out of the Brooklyn Dodgers' dugout.

"The overflow crowd was four deep outside the court. Among the spectators were hecklers shouting, 'Beat the nigger!' While such taunts would unnerve many players, Althea blocked them out and maintained her focus. 'It did not bother me,' she said. 'I made a vow to myself. Althea, you're not going to look around. You're not going to listen to any calls or remarks. All you're going to do is watch the tennis ball.'"

— On Althea Gibson's historic integrating of the Forest Hills Tournament in 1950

Many people might forget that the Venus and Serena Williams weren't the first African-Americans to play professional tennis. Neither was the late Arthur Ashe, although he was certainly a trailblazer in his own right. However, it was Althea Gibson (1927-2003) who integrated the sport, breaking down barrier after barrier in the late '40s and early '50s.

Born and raised in Harlem, Althea was a fierce competitor blessed with the determination to develop her talents despite the innu-

merable obstacles designed to discourage Blacks from even thinking about a career in tennis. Always carrying herself with a quiet dignity, she gradually rose in the ranks, perhaps peaking around 1957 and 1958, when she won back-to-back women's singles championships both at Forest Hills and Wimbledon. That feat would not be repeated for over 40 years.

"Born to Win: The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson" revisits each of this remarkable role model's achievements, while touching on some of the low points of her life as well. This compelling portrait was the result of collaboration between Frances Clayton Gray, Gibson's confidante and caretaker, and award-winning journalist Yannick Rice Lamb, who has served as an editor at *Essence* Magazine and at *The New York Times*. Other contributors include Bill Cosby, who, in the Foreword, comically recalls playing against Althea in a Pro-Celebrity charity tournament, and Venus Williams, who, in the Afterword, credits her predecessor with paving the way for other African-Americans.

"I am grateful to Althea Gibson for having the strength and courage to break through racial barriers in tennis," Venus concedes. "She knocked down walls, which gave us more freedom to concentrate on the game. And like Althea, I, too, feel a need to be a role model. Althea's accomplishments set the stage for my success. Through beneficiaries like me, Serena, and many others to come, her legacy will live on."

"Born to Win," a fitting, loving tribute to an All-American icon, chronicles an admirable tale of Black female empowerment during a difficult era for anyone who was Black or female, let alone both.

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