

Christian Bale delivers in best Batman adventure yet

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Although Batman is a quintessentially-American icon, for some reason, it took a British production to come up with the best screen adaptation of the comic book super-hero yet. This latest installment was directed by London-born Christopher Nolan, whose mind-bending, reverse murder mystery, "Memento," earned the #2 spot on this critic's 10 Best List of 2000.

Not only did Nolan decide to shoot the picture in his native country, but he went so far as to hire fellow countryman Christian Bale to play the title character. Furthermore, Brits comprise the bulk of the principal and supporting cast, including England's Michael Caine, Gary Oldman, Tom Wilkinson, Linus Roache and Colin McFarlane, and Ireland's Liam Neeson, Cillian Murphy, Gerard Murphy and Larry Holden. In fact, Morgan Freeman and Katie Holmes are the only Ameri-

cans in lead roles.

A slight issue of occasionally inauthentic accents notwithstanding, "Batman Begins" works splendidly for two reasons. First, it dispenses with the idea that the villains have to be quirky, colorful, superficial savants, like the "Batman" television series in the '60s. This film illustrates how far more compelling a plot can be when one works with fully fleshed-out antagonists, as opposed to stick-figured embodiments of evil with little or no depth.

Secondly, the picture presents millionaire Bruce Wayne as a brooding, vulnerable human being, taking us deep within his tortured psyche as a way of explaining the existential angst which led to the creation of his crime-fighting alter ego. We learn that, as a boy, he developed a paralyzing fear of bats after being trapped in a well while trying to retrieve an Indian arrowhead for his playmate Rachel Dawes (Holmes). Later, he was further traumatized when his



Bad guys beware: The masked crusader, Batman, is out to rid Gotham city of crime.

parents were murdered right in front of him during a mugging.

Overwhelmed by his loss, Bruce abandoned Gotham City for the Orient, where he struggled with his demons and studied martial arts at the feet of Ducard (Neeson), his mysterious mentor. His goal? To figure a way to channel his lust for revenge in a constructive fashion that will honor the altruistic Wayne

family name.

Meanwhile, his hometown is simultaneously degenerating into a cesspool of political and corporate corruption. In the nick of time, right after completing his training as a ninja, he vows to return to his roots to eradicate injustice and fear.

Upon his return to Gotham, he is upset to discover that, in his absence, Wayne Industries has come under the control of the dastardly Richard Earle (Rutger Hauer), a crooked CEO who has shifted the company's focus from philanthropic concerns to profits at any

cost. This irks Bruce because he hails from a long line of philanthropic do-gooders, including an ancestor who allowed runaway slaves to establish an Underground Railroad station in a cave on his estate.

So, what does he do but hook-up with Lucius (Freeman), a Black executive unfairly booted from the board of directors. Lucky for Bruce, the inventive Lucius has been banished to the institution's functional equivalent of a social Siberia, an isolated, remote basement where he has been free to tinker away, inventing

military prototypes like a bullet-proof bodysuit and an armor-plated automobile.

There, the Batman persona is born, and with the additional help of his loyal butler Alfred (Caine) and honest cop Jim Gordon (Oldman), the Caped Crusader embarks on a campaign to sweep the streets clean. This doesn't sit well with Mafia boss Carmine Falcone (Wilkinson) or with Dr. Jonathan Crane (Cillian Murphy), a.k.a. The Scarecrow, an urban terrorist with a weapon of mass destruction.

"Batman Begins" has a dark-hued cinematography that imbues the film with a relentlessly-grim tone, creating a somber visual tone which adults ought to appreciate, but which might actually be a bit too scary for kids under the age of ten. Do not expect to have the enveloping tension cut by silly asides, as director Nolan has studiously avoided distractions which might undercut the emotional tension.

Other pluses are long-overdue: batmobile and batsuit upgrades, state-of-the-art gadgetry, and spectacular chase scenes and fight (See *Batman*, Page 14)

Gospel singer Ronald Winans left legacy

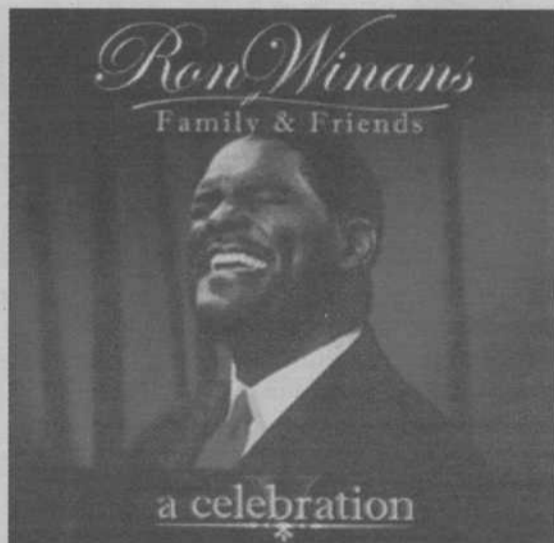
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Ronald Winans, a member of gospel music's famed Winans family, has died in a Detroit hospital after suffering complications related to heart problems.

Winans would have turned 49 on June 30. He died Friday at Harper Hospital where he was admitted after doctors realized he was retaining fluid.

Winans began his career when he and brothers Marvin and Carvin and Michael, were discovered by gospel singer Andrae Crouch.

They released their first album, (See *Winans*, Page 13)



THE YEAR 3000

Actor and singer Andre 3000 Benjamin (R), an honoree at the annual 'Premiere The New Power' party, jokes with director John Singleton while accepting an award at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles last week. The event was organized by movie magazine 'Premiere,' which honored Benjamin and others as Hollywood power players under the age of 35. Singleton directed Benjamin in the upcoming film 'Four Brothers'.

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