

Bow Wow can't smooth edges of rough skate flick

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

"Roll Bounce" comes courtesy of Malcolm Lee, a once-promising young filmmaker who struck out on his own following a brief apprenticeship with his cousin, Spike. In 1999, he made quite a splash with a sensational directorial debut, "The Best Man," an ensemble drama revolving around a bourgie, battle-of-the-sexes among a clique of college grads reunited in New York City for a wedding.

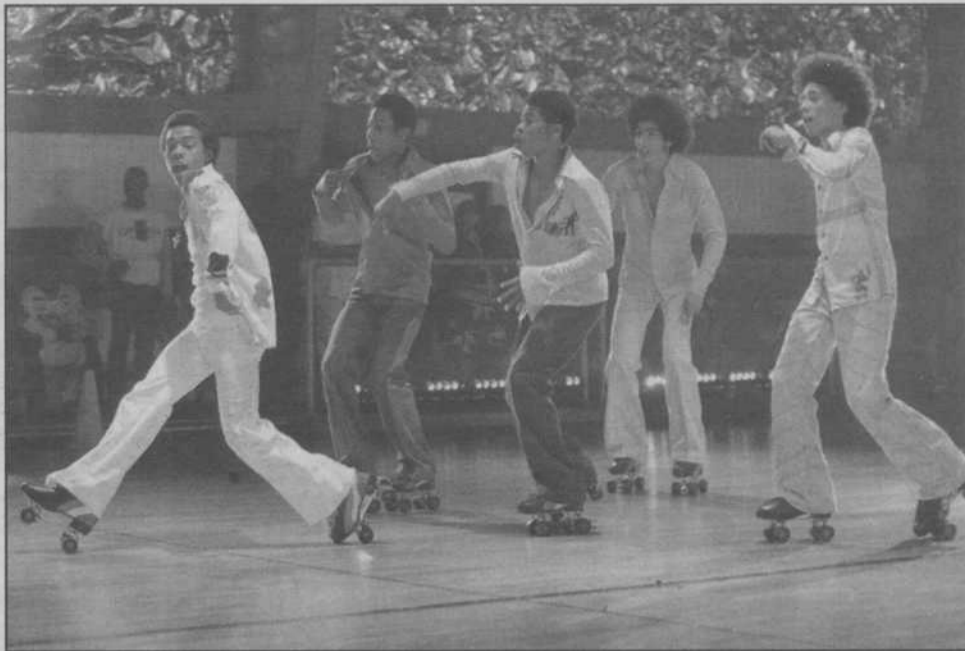
A few years later, his "Undercover Brother," a retro comedy set in the '70s, was just as well-received, leaving the wunderkind heaped with both critical acclaim and commercial success.

Understandably, then, expectations were high for Lee's third flick, which is why "Roll Bounce" might be the biggest disappointment of the year. Besides taking place in 1978 and featuring another expanded cast, this picture bears little resemblance to either of his earlier offerings.

The film stars Bow Wow as Xavier Curtis Smith or "X," the 14 year-old ring-leader of a rag-tag, roller skating team from the South Side of Chicago.

The formulaic front story has this posse of poor boys venturing to the city's upscale North Side after their local rink closes.

When they arrive at swanky Sweetwater's, their shabby outfits and outdated gear are ridiculed by their relatively well-off cross-town rivals, led by a trash-talking, ladies man nick-



Rapper Bow Wow makes his debut as a lead actor in 1970s skating film "Roll Bounce."

named Sweetness (Wesley Jonathan).

Predictably, rather than by resorting to violence, the gangs decide to settle their differences by competing in the annual Roller Jam Skate-Off.

But because this familiar underdogs overcoming-the-odds premise is set up in the first five minutes of the movie, this leaves about two hours of celluloid to fill.

Unfortunately, the over-ambitious script throws in far more subplots than the audience cares to keep track of.

For instance, X has two potential love interests, Toni (Jurnee Smollett), a tomboy with braces who has just moved in next-door, and blossoming Naomi (Meagan Good), who Sweetness also has his eye on.

Then, there are several sidebars having to do with the fact that X's mother died less than a year ago. His baby sister is still having night-

mares, his father (Chi McBride) is unmotivated and unemployed, and X is just angry at the world. The Smith family should consider itself lucky that Toni's scantily-clad, sexy mom (Kellita Smith) likes kids and is on the make, having been abandoned by her husband for a White woman.

Worse than this dizzying array of plot twists is the dumb dialogue which has its characters incessantly exchanging insults, even with friends, implying that they know no other way of conversing.

For some reason, teasing people about their skin color and ethnicity has become a big theme of brainless Black comedies like this.

So, it is repeatedly pointed out that Mixed Mike (Khleo Thomas) is half-Black and half-White, and he is derided as an "albino punk" although, curiously, his Caucasian mom is considered okay, be-

cause she has a Black woman's body." Asians are fair game, so they become the subject of stale karate jokes.

Females fare the worst in this film, with the tone being set early on when a teenager complains about unwanted touching when X, who she doesn't know, squeezes her hiney.

Instead of apologizing, he laughs it off, and has all of his homeys take a turn at rubbing her buttocks, too, as if

her feelings don't matter because her purpose is to pleasure males.

It is sad that this misogynistic message, a staple of gangsta' rap videos, is spilling over into African-American cinema.

On another occasion, X kisses a girl who doesn't want to be kissed, and then he walks away congratulating himself for getting away with another sexual assault without any consequences.

Throughout the film, Toni is tortured mercilessly about her braces, as "Heavy Metal," "Chompers," and elsewhat.

In "Roll Bounce," homosexuals are called "Fruity," Black children are "Niggers," dark-skinned people are "Skidmarks," the gainfully-employed are "Uncle Toms," and kinky hair is "bad," because, as one character explains, "Chicks only go for the good hair, not your naps." And Africa is equated with the primitive, with lines like, "Put some clothes on. This ain't Africa."

Black Americans are portrayed as borderline retarded by dialogue suggesting that they don't understand what

words like "indefinitely" mean.

As for the skating scenes, the actors are only shown from the waist up, while the fancy work of the stuntmen are shot in close-ups from the waist down. But it is easy to discern that the stars are rarely, if ever, really on roller skates. This exposes the exciting finale for a silly sham.

To add insult to injury, "Roll Bounce" unfolds like one long Pepsi ad, with dialogue extolling the cola's virtues and placements of the product being prominent in virtually every scene.

Trust me, I could continue ad infinitum with this litany of complaints about this disgraceful exercise in dehumanization, but I think I'll rest my case, since I've already given this trash far more attention than it deserves.

My only hope is that Malcolm Lee will give me an interview, because I'd love to hear what he has to say in his own defense.

Poor (0 stars). Rated PG-13 for profanity, underage sexuality, non-stop misogyny, crude humor and ethnic slurs.

Lil' Kim

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one thing that popped right into my brain, like studio, I need to go. It was more a release, not really a relief, but a release, definitely."

The album features collaborations with Snoop Dogg and The Game. She hopes it will showcase her versatility and prove her skills as a lyricist.

She boasts that she writes all her own rhymes and beams when she mentions her latest single, "Lighters Up," which has drawn vocal comparisons to Lauryn Hill.

"The reason why I love that comparison is because she's so universal, she's so versatile, and that's what I've always been and I am, and I've also tried to convey that. But for some reason people didn't understand it, but now they do."

Still, "The Naked Truth" is about more than artistic merit—it's about settling the score with those she sees as her betrayers. Though none of her enemies — Foxy Brown and her former Junior M.A.F.I.A. partners among them — are mentioned by name, they

are the subject of piercing jabs.

In the interview, Kim declined to discuss them, curtly dismissing Foxy Brown by saying: "Let's not mention her ...she's not on my level to me and I don't deal with that."

She also holds out for another reason: more details about her feuds will be revealed in an upcoming DVD which she promises will "explain what I went through, what really happened, and how deep it really is."


With good behavior, Kim could be free in nine months.

While some have suggested that doing time might make her seem even more gangsta — and therefore increase her record sales — Kim reacts with disdain at the mere mention that prison might enhance her rep.


She says the bid will make her "a strong woman."

"That's what I am, and that's what it's going to make me — even stronger. The bottom line is, whoever's tried to ruin me, my career and my life, they've done (messed) up now, because it's only going to make me stronger."

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