

# Usher shines in cross-cultural action film

By Kam Williams  
Sentinel-Voice

You know that times have certainly changed when you see an American-made movie about a Black DJ from the 'hood who steals the heart of the lawyer daughter of a White Mafia kingpin and the brother ends up welcomed into the family rather than swimming with the fishes. But that's just what we have with "In the Mix," a delightful dramedy which features handsome, R&B heartthrob Usher in his first starring role.

Inspired as much by such mobster comedies as "Analyze This" and "The Whole Nine Yards" as by "Romeo and Juliet" interpretations like "West Side Story" and "Romeo Must Die," this transparent tale makes light of all manner of cross-cultural differences while taking its own sweet time to arrive at its happily-ever-after grand finale.

Traditionally, Hollywood has treated interracial screen romances as ill-fated exercises in futility to the point



R & B singer Usher Raymond proves his acting chops in the satisfying "In the Mix."

where we've been socialized to react to the mere presence of a mixed couple as a source of tension. I have recognized this deeply ingrained prejudice in myself most often when watching a film from other parts of the world, especially Arab countries, Brazil or France.

What invariably happens is that after a relationship is

established between a Black and a White character, I sit there expecting for some issue to be explored revolving around skin color. But then I always feel a little embarrassed when the film ends without ever addressing that as a theme.

In the U.S., however, it's different, so it generally has fallen to a rebel like Dennis

Rodman to be daring enough to flout convention.

So, in "Simon Sez," Dennis, in the title role as a gun slinging secret agent, emerged victorious despite enjoying a steamy sex scene with an attractive White woman along the way. Although the movie didn't make much money, nonetheless, it marked a seminal mo-

ment in the history of cinema.

Similarly, "In the Mix" is of equal interest, because it also flips the script in a challenging fashion certain to make many American audiences uncomfortable. For Usher's character, Darrell Williams isn't exactly a boy-most-likely type, like the practically perfect doctor Sidney Poitier played in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner."

In fact, not only is Darrell just a struggling DJ, but he's a jive player who's already juggling a few girls, among them a café au lait cutie named Cherise (K.D. Aubert). Dolly (Emmanuelle Chriqui), by contrast, is relatively responsible, having just arrived back in town after finishing her second year of law school.

Darrell and Dolly's paths cross when he is hired to play music at a homecoming party being thrown in her honor by her proud papa, Frank Pacelli (Chazz Palminteri) at his restaurant in New York's Little Italy. Darrell only got the job because his own late father had been the bartender at Pacelli's. It's lust at first sight for these former childhood acquaintances who hadn't seen each other in years.

After Darrell takes a bullet intended for Frank during

an attempted hit by a competing mob family, the grateful patriarch rewards the act of bravery by hiring him as his daughter's bodyguard. Consequently, this makes it easy for the two to venture all over the city openly, yet secretly, at least until they are outed by one of Dolly's spurned suitors.

The moment of truth finally arrives when Pacelli has to wrestle with his own conscience and face the fact that his only objection to their union has to do with Darrell's being African-American.

While waiting for his blessing, look for humorous asides provided in the way of comic relief by a couple of shameless scene stealers — Kevin Hart as Darrell's clownish best friend, and Anthony Fazio as Black wannabe Frank, Jr.

Still, overall, "In the Mix" is the type of film which works to the extent that the two leads are able to generate a palpable chemistry between them. And since Usher and Emmanuelle easily achieve that air of authenticity, the movie engages and holds the viewer in the same fashion as the best of the romance genre.

Excellent (3.5 stars) .  
Rated PG-13 for sex, expletives and violence.

## Police: Prison beef led to shots

MONROEVILLE, Pa. (AP) - The fatal shooting at a theater where the 50 Cent movie "Get Rich or Die Tryin'" was playing stemmed from an old prison beef, police said Tuesday after they made an arrest in the case.

Larue Graves of Aliquippa was arrested at motel Tuesday and charged in the Nov. 9 shooting of Shelton Flowers. The two men, both 30, were in prison together, police said.

Flowers was shot at least three times after he got into an

argument inside a multiplex. Police said Flowers had just watched 50 Cent's movie and got into a confrontation with three men in the bathroom. A fight ensued and spilled out into the concessions area, where Flowers was shot.

The theater pulled the movie after the shooting.

Graves was paroled in 2004 after serving time for voluntary manslaughter. It was not immediately clear why Flowers had been in prison.

## Usher

(Continued from Page 7)

ented and a very professional actress. I did my best to sustain myself and kept it business-like.

KW: Did you have to set a boundary to make sure you never crossed a line?

UR: I think everybody was already mindful of it when they presented that role to me, initially. There was an entire script, so they knew what they were doing before we even got started.

KW: Did you have a girlfriend when you made the movie?

UR: Well, I did have a girlfriend at the time.

KW: How did she feel about your shooting a love scene?

UR: She was fine with it. Of course, it's acting, and we, as artists, have to make certain sacrifices and have certain arguments.

KW: What themes does "In the Mix" explore?

UR: There's the relationship and us keeping it a se-

cret; there's the Mafia and their struggle for power; there's the racial tension between Blacks and Italians in the film. But, to me, it's, basically, a film that opens up the minds of men and women to understand each other a lot better.

KW: What about an interracial romance theme?

UR: I truly don't believe that that's what this film's about. It just focuses on two people from two different worlds who come together through an uncommon situation and find love.

KW: Have you ever been in a relationship in real life that you had to keep secret?

UR: Every relationship I get in is a secret. [laughs]

KW: Seriously, what kind of challenge is that?

UR: We, as entertainers, try to have as much privacy as we possibly can. It never works. It's a part of success. It's a part of what this is.

KW: Do you ever feel like a prisoner of your own suc-

cess, despite having a new movie and the best selling CD in the country?

UR: No, it's encouraging. If you can do it with CDs, hopefully, you can do it with movies.

KW: It's been rumored that you're going to be in the screen version of "Dreamgirls" opposite Beyonce. Is that true?

UR: There are a lot of films that I've been considered for that I've, unfortunately, had to walk away from because of scheduling. As it is, it's very hard to balance being somewhat of a Renaissance Man. You got basketball; you got the new label coming; you got the soundtrack; you got the movie; you got your next album, and then you got your life. You know what I mean?

KW: Yep.

UR: The clothing line, all of the above. So, it's kind of hard to balance it all. And if it doesn't perfectly fit into my schedule, like a puzzle, I

might have to pass up on it.

KW: At this point, how far ahead of time is your schedule already being blocked out?

UR: Right now, I'm making plans for 2009. I plan ahead.

KW: Are you still close to your mother?

UR: One of the greatest gifts that I have ever been granted was to have a mother like mine and a manager who was willing to fight for what she believed in. I recognize her as a woman and a person before a mother, because I've watched her, as her son, go through all the issues she has to deal with as a Black woman in America.

It's not easy for women in America, period. And it's even more so. So, observing her has been very encouraging to me. I definitely say that without her, I probably would have made a lot of mistakes. I am the man that I am because of her.



## EXTRA MILES

Jazz trumpeter Miles Davis is shown in concert in the old Roman Amphitheater in Caesarea, north of Tel Aviv, Israel, on June 1, 1987. Davis is among five musical legends to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the organization announced Monday.