

Lackluster Kong remake tests viewers' endurance

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Maybe it was a bad idea to give Peter Jackson all those Oscars for "Lord of the Rings," because it seems only to have emboldened the gifted New Zealander to mount another interminable, special effects-driven spectacular which devotes too much attention to computer-generated enhancement at the expense of plot, dialogue, motivation and character development. Unfortunately, while this faithful remake of "King Kong" easily overshadows the original in terms of technical wizardry, it still suffers from the same limitations in terms of its storyline, which is where the 1933 classic really could have used an overhaul.

This version features Oscar-nominee Naomi Watts (for "21 Grams") in scream queen Fay Wray's role as aspiring actress Ann Darrow. The typecast Watts has previously played this sort of struggling thespian a few times before, most notably in "Mulholland Drive" and "Ellie Parker."

Oscar-winner Adrien Brody (for "The Pianist") co-stars as scriptwriter Jack Driscoll, Ann's love interest, while Jack Black provides a little comic relief as maniacal moviemaker Carl Denham. You need plenty of sacrificial lamb in any high-attrition horror flick, so rounding out the ensemble cast are Kyle Chandler as



Aside from the monster, only King Kong's budget proved larger than life in this remake.

self-assured actor Bruce Baxter, Thomas Kretschmann as Captain Englehorn, Evan Parke as first mate Hayes, Jamie "Billy Elliot" Bell as cabin boy Jimmy, Lobo Chan as Choy, and Andy Serkis doing double-duty both as Lumpy the Cook and as Kong himself.

Set during The Great Depression, the adventure unfolds against the backdrop of a bustling New York City blessed with a decidedly Art Deco decor at every turn. After the obligatory tone-setting opening, we find Ann dancing in a vaudeville chorus line, blissfully unaware that she is about to lose her job.

Then, after the theater closes unexpectedly, she is left with no legitimate means of support and contemplates compromising her values by stripping in a burlesque

show. But Ann is saved by a fortuitous encounter with Carl, a slippery character who gets the gullible girl to sign on as the leading lady in his action flick about to be shot in the Far East. Similarly, the fledgling filmmaker tricks Jack to board the ominously-christened S.S. Venture. In fact, not even the stoked steamship's motley crew is aware of Carl's true intentions, namely, to search for the ruins of a primitive civilization said to be located on an uncharted island somewhere in the South Seas.

With over three hours to fill, Peter Jackson takes his sweet time arriving at scary Skull Island. So, expect to be checking your watch and dozing off a lot during the interminable build-up. And unless you're the type of cine-snob that enjoys clever homage, several, to other movies, you'd also best brace

yourself to be annoyed by endless allusions to "Titanic," "Tarzan," "E.T.," "Moby Dick," "The Seven Year Itch," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Jazz Singer," "Heart of Darkness," "The African Queen," "Jurassic Park," "Pirates of the Caribbean," "The Passion of the Christ," "The Lord of the Rings" and "King Kong versus Godzilla," to name a few.

For instance, when a Nestle's chocolate bar is extended as a conversational ice breaker, it is oh so reminiscent of how Henry lured E.T. home with a trail of Reese's Pieces. It's bad enough that a prominent ad placement would arrive at a very dramatic moment, but it's worse when that scene is itself just an unimaginative rip-off. A bona fide blockbuster ought to have more going for it than clever references to other pictures.

Another faux pas of the film involves its ridiculous reliance on a blue screen. This resulted in take-after-take of wide-eyed actors, especially Mr. Black, captured with the look of utter bewilderment of someone obviously playing against invisible creatures and sets that had to be added later via the magic of digital technology.

Since the original "King Kong" was shot during less enlightened times, one might reasonably expect the current

characterization of the aborigines the expedition encounters on Skull Island to reflect the tolerance called for in these days of diversity and multiculturalism. But no, this picture's natives, played by actors of every ethnicity — but in blackface — are presented every bit as uncivilized as previously, as wild savages more challenging to tame than Kong.

Overall, this lackluster cure for insomnia might have been more palatable without so many distracting digressions and pared down to a manageable 90 minutes or so. As is, by the time the monkey business you're waiting for finally arrives, it's so anti-climactic, and don't be surprised to find yourself impatient for the famous Empire State Building finale that's still over an hour away.

Zzzz... Zzzz... Zzzz...
Fair (1 star), PG-13 for frightening images and disturbing horror violence)

Sharpton dismisses sitcom

NEW YORK—Al Sharpton, who was previously in talks with CBS to star in a sitcom, says he's not interested in being a TV star after all. "I haven't done the things I've done to be in a sitcom," Sharpton told the *News & Observer* of Raleigh, N.C., in Tuesday's editions.

The Democrat, who has run for president, mayor of New York and the Senate, was earlier this month reported to be working with CBS on a pilot tentatively titled, "Al in the

Family" — an allusion to the Archie Bunker classic '70s show.

"I'm not interested in being Archie Bunker, I'm looking forward to becoming George Bush," Sharpton said, alluding to a possible future presidential race.

The 51-year-old activist-minister said there had been discussions with Paramount Television, but those talks had ended. The show was to have been about a family with "conflicting social and political views."

Sharpton

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quotes Corbett as saying: "If you miss one payment your car could be repossessed."

Aycox' Dec. 7 follow-up letter counters, "Surely you understand that LoanMax cannot repossess a car without first sending a Notice of Default or a Right to Cure letter. A car cannot be repossessed simply by missing one payment."

Aycox adds, "I have worked hard to build a company that provides a reasonable product to a consumer group that was not being served."

Corbett doesn't waiver in response to the company's lucrative offer to Sharpton: "This is how much money these guys make on the backs of the poor."

Despite his rejection of the offer, Sharpton said he has received many calls in support of the commercials from people who lament that they can't get loans from regular banks and lending institutions because of bad credit. Nevertheless, there must be controls, he said.

"I find no illegal practices that LoanMax has been accused of, and in no way am I trying to substantiate any claims that you have made in writing that your company has been miscast or even slandered," Sharpton writes in his letter to Aycox. "However, I am concerned about a general industry-wide climate in auto lending that opens the door to possible predatory behavior, and an unbearable burden on the people I have struggled for all my life."

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