

# Success aside, 'Stomp' weakly acted

By Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

After his brother, Duron (Chris Brown), was murdered in a street fight over something as silly as dancing, Darnell James Williams, a.k.a. DJ, (Columbus Short) is fortunate that his Aunt Jackie (Valerie Pettiford) and Uncle Nate (Harry J. Lennix) are willing to rescue him from his ghetto in South Central Los Angeles. So, DJ moves to Atlanta where he takes up residence in their comfy suburban home until he decides to matriculate as a freshman at a mythical Black college called Truth University.

The only hitch is that he has to lie on his application, because he has a criminal record, having been unfairly convicted of assault for having come to the assistance of his sibling when they were jumped by the rival gang.

Taking the risk that this omission might one day come back to bite him, DJ decides to pay for his college education by working part-time as a gardener for his uncle who just happens to have the landscaping concession for the school.

For some reason, everywhere he goes on campus, whether planting petunias, registering for a class or watching fraternity pledges make fools of themselves during a hazing ritual, he notices the same irresistibly-rounded rump of April (Meagan Good). What this butt-obsessed brother doesn't know is that the curvy coed so obligingly shaking her tail feathers has a cute face to match her pretty posterior, and that she, unfortunately, already has a boyfriend.

So, standing between DJ and pneumatic bliss is Grant, (Darrin Dewitt Henson) an upperclassman, who just happens to be the best dancer among the Gammas.

This is of considerable significance because Truth U. is a place where a man is not judged by the color of his skin but by the content of his choreography.

This bodes well for DJ, who is not only the best hooper whoever came to Georgia from California, but he just happens to be pledging at cross-campus rival Theta Nu Theta. This means that maybe, just maybe, he'll be able to steal April from Grant while simultaneously showing up the stuffed shirt in the National Step Cham-



"Stomp the Yard" places an emphasis on dance action, but not enough on acting.

pionship.

Of course, the fly in the ointment arrives when Provost William Palmer (Allain Louis) learns about DJ's rap sheet and kicks him out of school. But wouldn't you know that Palmer just happens to be April's dad? And while his daughter is twisting one of her daddy's arms to get DJ reinstated, Aunt Jackie can twist the other. Why? Because she just happens to have dated Dr. Palmer back before she met her hubby.

If you haven't guessed by now, coincidence plays a big part in "Stomp the Yard," one of those cinematic disasters that is god-awful, but in an enjoyable sort of way. When DJ registers for a tutor, guess who he gets? April!

The problems emanated from the dreadful script which was written by Robert Adetuyi, the same culprit credited for the equally-abysmal "Code Name: The Cleaner," also currently in theaters. They were compounded when the studio picked Sylvain White to direct. I question the selection of a European-bred brother to make a movie set at a historically Black college.

This picture is so full of implausible nonsense, I could dissect its flaws for at least ten pages. For instance, the students at this institution of higher learning speak with the worst grammar imaginable, such as "You fine, but you ain't all that."

Then there's the scene where DJ's so absorbed by April sitting next to him that he drives a car for five minutes without ever looking at the road.

The key to success at college is described as "Get a group of girls to do your homework."

How about the questionable attire, such as the step teams' outfits comprised of

baggy, Ali Baba balloon pants, topped-off by 'wife beater' tee shirts. They looked like refugees from an MC Hammer video.

Then, there's the picture's not so subtle, prevailing characterization of darker-skinned females as sex-starved, dangerous, mysterious, and almost threatening, reminiscent of the primitive picture of Africa conjured by the imagination of Joseph Conrad in "Heart of Darkness." Here, one particularly scary sister looked so menacing, she was like Mike Tyson in a halter top.

Personally, I was most annoyed by the opening scene of the movie, when Duron was expiring in DJ's arms. "Don't die, nigger," he begs.

Did the n-word have to be the last thing he heard before dying?

Less a feature film, than a two-hour United Negro College Fund public service announcement for anyone interested in obtaining a Ph.D. in bling and booty calls. A mind is a terrible thing to lose.

Poor (0 stars). Rated PG-13 for sexuality, profanity, ethnic slurs and violence.



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