

King movie one of season's best

Continued from 5B

speech pattern and mannerisms. With the salt-and-pepper fright wig, Rhames is nearly the spitting image of King.

But it's Rhames' immense talent as an actor which makes his performance so memorable. He plays King with a street savvy which makes the character nearly likable. The performance is at times tempered with humor. Watching him explain the history of the word motherf---r to a pastor and his wife is as funny as it is profane. And when the character turns ruthless, Rhames is just as believable. He seems to have absorbed King's persona and lets it ooze out in this stunning, possibly Emmy-nabbing, performance.

The acting is first rate throughout. "Family Matters" Darius McCrary gives a career defining performance as Muhammad Ali. He looks like a young Ali and acts like him. He has the voice down, but it wavers at times. There are also some continuity lapses. Ali is aged outside the ring but looks basically the same while inside. Still, McCrary passes as the champ with flying colors.

Vondie Curtis-Hall ("Chicago Hope" and "Dream Girls") is wonderful as r&b singer Lloyd Price, King's business partner. It was Price who introduced King to Ali. He also came up with the wild hairdo while promoting the "Rumble In The Jungle" fight. Curtis-Hall is

cool, laid back, playing Price with an understated sense of pride.

Jeremy Piven (Hank Schwartz), David Keith (Herbert Muhammad), Danny Johnson (Larry Holmes), Loretta Devine (Constance Harper), Bernie Mac (Bundini Brown) and Lahmard Tate (Carl King) turn in fine performances as well.

Director John Herzfeld does an excellent job with pacing for the film. There's never a dull moment. He mixes a great balance of comic and dramatic elements.

Say what you will about King. He may be a scoundrel, but his life makes great TV. Bravo, HBO.

Usher's calling Atlanta home

Continued from 5B

n't work out."

The Chattanooga, Tenn., native, wasn't without a label for long, however. Usher, whose real name is Raymond +Usher+ IV, was living in Atlanta with his mother and younger brother when a LaFace Records representative spotted him at a talent show. The Atlanta-based label signed him, spent the past three years creating "My Way" and released it in September.

The album's first track, "You Make Me Wanna..." already is a No. 1 platinum single. It reached an audience of more than 50 million listeners on Broadcast Data Systems' monitored R&B stations by early October, giving it the highest-ever R&B listenership of any single record.

The song is a melodic blend of Usher's smooth, youthful voice and a strong, upbeat rhythm track. The album mixes ballads, hip-hop and rap, with vocals by Lil' Kim, Shanice Wilson and Monica.

Usher credits Babyface with teaching him to write songs about his own life, although Usher admits he's had little dating experience to serve as inspiration for his love songs.

"I have so many more things to do—a relationship takes time and patience. I do understand that," he says. "This album—a lot of things on it may be exaggerated to the next level."

For now, the only woman with any prominence in Usher's life is his mother, who got him singing in church when he was 6.

"My mother is a great mother. No one can really understand the relationship we have," he says. "My mother is a friend over a manager over a mom. She's always been there for me. ... My mother did whatever it took."

Part of what it took, was a lot of travel by Usher and his mother, accompanied by a tutor, to accommodate a schedule of performances and recordings throughout his adolescence. Usher just

recently got his high school diploma.

Usher says his mother works as his manager so she "can watch her baby grow."

"It always helps to have someone behind you, and my mother was my person. I encourage parents to stay with the kids," he says.

Usher, whose father isn't involved in his life, devotes a lot of his conversation to his charity work and interest in children's organizations, such as the Boys & Girls Clubs. Usher himself went to the Boys & Girls Club after-school program when his mother worked, he says.

"Like, every chance I get, I sit down with the kids. I play basketball with them, talk to them," he says. "I encourage them to stay at the Boys & Girls Club. I tell them, 'Do what you've got to do (to succeed). I'm always going to encourage you.'"

Jones looking to future

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LA CROSSE, Wis. — In an ironic twist, advice on what needs to be done to create a prosperous new millennium came from the deep, penetrating voice of "Star Wars" villain Darth Vader.

Actor James Earl Jones delivered a serious message to a packed crowd at the University Wisconsin-La Crosse.

But the audience, made up primarily of students and other young people, exploded into applause during a question-and-answer period when Jones obliged a woman who asked him to assume his Vader voice to say "Luke, I am your father," the infamous words from "Return of the Jedi."

Jones said Thursday night during his appearance as part of the school's Unity Through Valuing Diversity Week that economically we should adopt a human-centered bill of rights that provides minimum affordable food and shelter to everyone.

He also said that bill of rights should provide free access to educational resources, practical and affordable health care and absolute freedom of expression in the workplace and in society.

Jones, who has also appeared in many other popular movies, including "Field of Dreams," "Clear and Present Danger" and "The Hunt for Red October," said he still hasn't had his favorite film role.

Jones, like National Basketball Association star Charles Barkley, also insisted he did not want to be a role model because "their shadow blocks your light."



Jones

Kevin Thomas, LOS ANGELES TIMES
 "There are no false notes in this fine, venturesome film, one of the year's best. We witness not a single instance of racial discrimination or bigotry but instead share in a mystical experience of what it means to be a black woman - proud, beautiful, vulnerable yet resilient."

Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE
 "Strikingly good...a film touched by magic."

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