

Spike Lee sounds off on moviemaking, Academy Awards and 'Driving Miss Daisy'

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film, "Jungle Fever" was Halle Berry's first film, Clockers was Mekhi Phifer's first film ...

AP: Are these accidents or on purpose?

Lee: We always earmark two or three spots to give someone really talented a platform to shine, a jump-off.

AP: What was Halle like playing the crackhead in "Jungle Fever"?

Lee: I didn't want to cast her. She looked too good! I said, "Halle, I can't believe you as a two-dollar crack ho." She said, "Spike, believe me." She came to the set the first day, I ain't recognize her.

AP: "Jungle Fever" was about interracial relationships. You ever date a white girl?

Lee: (Slowly shakes his head.) But it's no big thing.

The thing people misconstrued about "Jungle Fever" is that Spike Lee was saying all interracial marriages are awful. What we were showing was that the relationship between Wesley's character and Annabella Sciorra's character, it wasn't built on a foundation. It was built on myths. She was with him because she heard about the prowess of the sexual black man. He bought into the myth that the white woman is the epitome of beauty.

AP: What's your feeling about the Oscars these days? Do you vote?

Lee: I vote, but I take it with a grain of salt. Not just for African Americans, but just in general. You give an organization, some group, the power to validate your work of art - that can be paralyzing. ... "Malcolm X" was big-

ger than the Academy Awards. "Do the Right Thing" was bigger than the awards. We got two nominations for "Do the Right Thing," I got a best original screenplay nomination. Danny Aiello got best supporting actor, and he lost to Denzel (Washington) in "Glory." But you know what got best picture that year?

AP: Nope.

Lee: "Driving Miss Daisy." "Do the Right Thing," there are classes on that in universities all across the country. That film is still being watched. Every year it's growing in stature. No one talks about "Driving Miss Daisy." There's nothing there.

AP: Any favorites for best actor this year?

Lee: Lemme ask a question. How many nominations did "Cold Mountain" get? ... When you ever seen a film

that takes place during slavery with no slaves in it?

AP: People have been agitating about that.

Lee: Lemme ask you a question. When I was in third and fourth grade, there was a re-release of "Gone with the Wind," and our teacher took us to see it. This was like '67, '68. Even at that young age, I knew those roles were stereotypical.

Hattie McDaniel won the supporting actress Oscar, and another great African-American actress was in it, Butterfly McQueen. They were such great actresses, despite the straitjacket of those stereotypes, they were able to put some of their humanity into it. Now, both "Gone with the Wind" and "Cold Mountain" romanticize the South. But we're going backward if "Gone with the

Wind" is more progressive than "Cold Mountain." "Gone with the Wind" was made in

1939. In 2004 we're not even in it? We're going backward. I don't understand it.

'Passion' hauls in \$117.5 million in five days

By David Germain
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES - Mel Gibson's gamble on "The Passion of the Christ" paid off enormously, riding a storm of religious debate to a \$117.5 million haul in its first five days, according to studio estimates Sunday.

"The Passion," which debuted on Ash Wednesday, rocketed to the No. 1 box-office slot for the weekend with \$76.2 million from Friday to Sunday. It was the seventh-best three-day opening ever, behind "Spider-Man" at \$114.8 million and such Hollywood franchises as "The Matrix Reloaded" and the first two "Harry Potter"

movies. "The Passion" put up the second-best five-day figures for a movie opening on Wednesday, behind last year's "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" at \$124.1 million and ahead of "Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace" at \$105.6 million.

The first movie released in 2004 to cross the \$100 million mark, "The Passion" easily passed the weekend's No. 2 flick, "50 First Dates" at \$88.7 million, as the year's top-grossing film.

Once considered a niche film that would appeal mainly to conservative Christians, the bloody chronicle of

Christ's crucifixion swelled to blockbuster proportions as Gibson rallied church groups to support it and accusations of anti-Semitism brought mainstream attention.

"It's an event movie," said Bruce Davey, Gibson's partner in his film company Icon Productions. "It all began with the grass-roots campaign we started, but the controversy has obviously helped in creating awareness."

Some Jewish and Christian leaders have said they fear "The Passion" will revive the notion that Jews collectively were responsible for Christ's death.

Gibson has denied such

accusations, and key cast members - including Jim Caviezel, who plays Christ, and Maia Morgenstern, a Jewish actress who plays Mary - said Gibson approached the film with great respect for Judaic traditions.

Gibson put up the movie's \$25 million budget and will reap most of the returns. Hollywood studios passed on the movie, so Gibson put it in theaters through independent distributor Newmarket Films, which will get a cut of Gibson's profits.

"The Passion" provided a box-office jolt for theaters, whose ticket sales were run-

Please see PASSION/3D

R. Kelly gets a break in child pornography case

By Abdon M. Palasch
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Prosecutors in Chicago have dropped seven of the 21 child pornography counts against R & B Superstar R. Kelly on Friday. Advertisement



Kelly

While prosecutors downplayed it as routine trial strategy, Kelly's publicist proclaimed it, "the first official acknowledgement of the weakness of the case."

Kelly's attorneys argued that counts 15 through 21 on the child pornography indictment handed down against Kelly in June, 2002, were based on state law enacted after Kelly allegedly videotaped himself engaging in sex acts with an underage girl.

The prosecutors said they would drop the counts rather than argue.

"As a matter of trial strategy, the state always reviews an indictment prior to trial and proceeds to trial on selected counts of the indictment," Special Assistant Cook County State's Attorney Ellen Mandelort said.

The first 14 counts could still land him up to 15 years in jail

Kelly's attorney Ed Genson said the dropping of the charges showed "the problems" the state had with the indictment but declined fur-

ther comment.

Kelly secured permission from a Cook County judge to travel to Los Angeles for the "Soul Train" awards later this month. He must check in every day and avoid contact with children.

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'Gigli' earns Razzies

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romance was off.

The movie, which starred Affleck as a thug smitten by Lopez as a lesbian crime colleague, fell short of the record seven Razzies won by "Showgirls" and "Battlefield Earth."

"But those are much better bad movies, if that makes any sense," said Razzies founder John Wilson. "If you sit through them with the right people or the right brand of liquor, they can be strangely entertaining."

"But I don't care how medicated you are or what people you're watching it with, 'Gigli' is just a pain in the posterior. It's one of those things that is, as opposed to enjoyably embarrassing, it's just skin-crawlingly embarrassing."

"Gigli" cost \$54 million to make but earned back just \$6 million.

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COCA-COLA "STUDENT" OF THE MONTH
D'Ares Jenard Potts
Second Grader,
Reid Park Elementary School

Aspirations:
Learning to play the keyboard, and playing professional football some day.

"If I don't make it as a professional football player, becoming a fireman would be my second choice," says D'Ares.

Our "Student of the Month," D'Ares J. Potts, or DJ, Dee and Jenard, as he is most affectionately known, is an honor student at Reid Park Elementary School, and is enrolled in the After School Enrichment program. With proven academic excellence, and after demonstrating a love of learning, D'Ares was placed in advanced classes. He has daily dialogue about things he learns in class, and often uses his new knowledge to test the skills of others.

A well-rounded student, D'Ares has received many awards in school including, perfect attendance, good citizenship, "Caught Doing The Right Thing" award, Student of the Week and library award.

Involved in the community, D'Ares has participated in Boy Scouts of America, and has taken karate classes. Even though he has been described as being "two boys in one," and a little mischievous, Dee has a natural passion for helping and giving to others. He has had many experiences of visiting nursing homes and doing good deeds for patients. Additionally, Dee has impressed many with his excellent manners and gentlemanly acts of kindness, such as opening doors. This has been a hit with strangers and even family members. Enjoyable activities for Dee include traveling, visiting amusement parks, bike riding, video games, and eating, eating, eating. Disney radio and TV channels can keep him content for hours.

D'Ares is the son of Yolunda D. Potts and Kenneth Shouse. He has an older loving and protective sister, D'Moya and two younger sisters. A dedicated member of Greater Salem Church, Dee is very active in the youth ministries, loves singing in the choir, and participating in plays and performances. Recently he and his 7-year-old cousin entered a talent show with an original spiritual dance performance.

D'Ares has an extensive list of loved ones to include teachers, ministers, grandpa, grandpa, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and the list is still growing.

Best Wishes "D'Ares" From Coca Cola Bottling Company Consolidated of Charlotte

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