

'Brothers' Improves Upon Genre

By MICHAEL WOODS
Staff Writer

"A father should be wiser than his son," says Fred (Clifton Powell) to his son Jackson (Morris Chestnut). "I'm glad that this time it turned out not to be true."

You'll feel the same way after seeing "The Brothers." With its candid wit and smooth blend of bawdy humor and heartwarming moments, there's no doubt that "The Brothers"



got the best genes available in the growing family of upscale black drama-comedies and also learned from the mistakes of its cinematic elders.

Writer/director Gary Hardwick's debut feature focuses on black men, sex and relationships and will inevitably be compared to "The Wood" and "The Best Man." But comparisons shouldn't extend beyond the theme and casting similarities.

While its predecessors only offered random flashbacks, "The Brothers" succeeds in following the lives and trials of its characters.

Each of the film's four headliners - Jackson, Brian (Bill Bellamy), Derrick (D.L. Hughley) and Terry (Shemar Moore) - has successfully climbed up the corporate ladder but is still working his way through the maze of love. And each man has a unique approach on how to handle the situation.

The most introspective and well-developed member of the crew is Jackson. Bothered by his growing chain of unfulfilling relationships as well as his growing age, he turns to therapy sessions for answers.

The contemplative path is not Terry's choice. He suddenly decides that the time has come to stop playing games and settle down. His fiancée is right on target, but his heart is shooting blanks and, predictably, he backs out of the wedding.

Derrick had no problems tying the knot, but his situation is still twisted. The group's lone married man, he is the voice of reason and humorous truth. He listens to his pals' exploits and is quick to cut their egos down to size. Derrick, however, is much more frustrated with his own head case than theirs. His wife's (Tamala R. Jones) disdain for oral sex

provides some of the movie's biggest laughs.

Brian only wishes that his relationship problems were limited to one woman. A smug attorney with a cynical attitude, Brian is the adolescent among this posse of black professionals. In his opinion, they are looking for love in all the wrong places.

"Face it," he boasts to his boys during one of several therapeutic hoops scenes. "We're the cream of the crop."

Terry checks him, noting that Brian is merely "the black sticky shit at the bottom of the barrel."

While escaping many tired clichés, "The Brothers" still has some of the nasty residue that plagued previous efforts in its genre. The plot is sparse, the camera work is hackneyed, and the editing is slack. Hardwick doesn't experiment artistically and, at times, fails to properly control the elements of soap opera and sitcom that he unleashes.

But those flaws are hardly noticeable while you're watching the movie.

Ultimately, "The Brothers" is a highly enjoyable romp that provides a refreshing perspective on matters of the heart.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

'George Washington' Avoids Trite Poverty Clichés, Explores Heroism

By JEREMY HURTZ
Staff Writer

George W. himself appears in the film "George Washington" only on a dollar bill; a portrait of George (no-W.) Bush which hangs in one character's bedroom is far more prominent.

But our first president's spirit pervades these frames, which explore the distinctly American idea that any child can grow up to be a hero - or at least lead the country.

The images of "George Washington" will haunt my dreams. A black boy in a homemade superhero outfit directing traffic that doesn't need direction; a man carving his child's pet dog into a coonskin-style cap; a train car seen in such a closeup shot that it seems a machine from another world.

Set in Winston-Salem, "George" tells of kids coming to terms with their poor world. One, George Richardson, suffers a congenital birth defect which makes his head sensitive and requires him to wear a protective helmet. Another, a waifish blonde, frets that she has no capacity for regret.

The adults in their lives experience

similar roadblocks to achieving heroic compassion. George's guardian uncle compulsively cuts firewood - and anything else he can find - in their backyard.

One worker at the railyard where much of the action occurs cares for the neighborhood children but can only think about their superficial physical safety: "Is your urine clear? That's good. Means you're healthy."

Though every character here is swimming below the poverty level, this isn't in an "Aren't those children so pathetic? Just look at them. Let's weep" picture. Poverty doesn't always mean sorrow. These kids find meditative joy in games and crushes.

"George's" first third is a spate of moments. Practically each shot is its own tiny scene; so much snappy dialogue and meditative still-frame combine into a thoroughly convincing evocation of the scattershot coherence of long-ago memories.

This sense of recollection becomes even more palpable once the film gains narrative thrust, through a cataclysmic plot turn. Tragedy forces three of the children to discover heroism within themselves - or its lack - and the film's small episodes reach a blissful profundity.

Much has been made of this picture's debt to the work of Terrence Malick. And "George's" director, David Gordon Green, admits that "The Thin Red Line" helped inspire him. But Green does Malick one better, by reigning in the pensive beauty of his well-

shot images, never repeating himself and spicing the solemnity with absurd hilarity.

Near the film's end, one child tells another, "Sometimes I smile and laugh when I think about all the great things you're going to do. I hope you never die." The same could be said to Green. A debut this assured promises a stunning and heroic career.

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