



Robert Townsend's "Hollywood Shuffle" will play at the Sheldon Film Theatre this weekend.

## "Shuffle" lampoons stereotypes... on a wing and a MasterCard

By Scott Harrah  
Senior Editor

Hollywood rarely does minorities any political, ideological or social justice. Blacks are often cast as pimps, hookers, street thugs or Uncle Tom-esque slaves who perpetuate the watermelon-chomping, welfare recipient stereotypes. Indians are cast as warriors and squaws; hispanics are portrayed as your average Tijuana greaseball or Cuban refugee.

### Film Review

And homosexuals, until recently, were either cast as lavender limp-wristed poofs doing their hair in powder puff salons or as hardcore Castro Street leather monsters. The idiocy and hatred imbued in Tinseltown casting techniques is wonderfully and hilariously lampooned in Robert Townsend's critically acclaimed satire "Hollywood Shuffle."

In order to understand the polemical magnitude of "Shuffle" one must first look at director/writer/producer Townsend, who plays the lead role of Bobby Taylor. Townsend's "A Soldier's Story" earned him enough bucks to buy the Porsche he always dreamed of. But when he decided he had little use for one, he instead invested in the production of "Shuffle." According to an interview in *The Village Voice*, Townsend started to run out of funds when he discovered something in his mailbox:

new Visa and MasterCards with large credit lines. He used numerous cards to finance the remainder of the film and eventually charged up \$100,000. He used what credit he had left to throw a huge premiere for the film, which brought the film to the attention of its distributors, the Samuel Goldwyn Company. The studio then sank a million dollars worth of publicity into the film, critics raved and box offices went wild.

The plot revolves around Bobby Taylor, an actor who lands a stereotypical jive-turkey-street bro-rappin-slice 'em up-blood role in a film that resembles an episode of "Starsky and Hutch." His producer thinks he's not black enough, the NAACP thinks he's too typical and he starts to believe the black Hollywood creed: "We will never play Rambos until we stop playing Sambos."

The thought of being cast in a major production has some ambivalence attached to it. Bobby has just left a life of working at a seedy hot dog joint called Winky Dinky Dog, so things seem sweet, but criticism from friends and a possible job at the post office looms large over his conscience.

As he ponders the situation, he starts to imagine numerous surreal vignettes that display the racism of Hollywood throughout the years. Such as "The Black Acting School," where one can learn to play pimps, thugs and hookers with the inimitable "cool black dude" shuffle walk. In another scene, Bobby dreams of a black Siskel and Ebert-type review show entitled "Sneak-

in' into the Movies," in which two streetwise "mo' fo's" criticize films like "Attack of the Killer Pimps."

Although the vignettes are often hilarious, Townsend sometimes gets too carried away with his message and starts to metaphorically hit audiences over the head until even the most brain-dead viewer is able to comprehend the premise of "Shuffle." This is especially true in the end when a sort of political rap is performed by the cast. ("We're tired of playing pimps and hos/We just want better roles.") "Yes, we do understand that, Mr. Townsend — sir," you want to say.

One of the major controversies surrounding "Shuffle" has been its treatment of homosexuals. One critic lambasted Townsend's "unattractive homophobia." On the contrary, the film's portrayal of homosexuals is *intentionally* offensive. In one scene, Bobby calls a queeny hairdresser "girl" and later talks about "some fag I met at a party" in a vignette satirizing detective films. If it's necessary for Townsend to eviscerate negative stereotypes about minorities in general, then it only seems rational that he chose to illuminate the Miss Clairiol view of gays.

"Hollywood Shuffle" runs Thursday through Sunday at the Sheldon Film Theatre with screenings at 7 and 9 p.m. Matinee shows: 1 and 3 p.m. Saturday and 3 and 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$4.00. Running with the show is "Bang!", a 10 minute short featuring the drawings and short-gun surrealism of artist Breer.

## Winston returns to Omaha Orpheum

Solo pianist George Winston will return to the Orpheum Theatre on Friday, July 10, at 8 p.m. with a new summer show.

His recordings began in 1980 and include three solo piano albums: "Autumn" (1980), "Winter Into Spring" (1982), and "December"

(1982) on the Windham Hill label. His most recent project is an album of the children's story, "The Velveteen Rabbit," in which he plays piano to narration by Meryl Streep.

Tickets for George Winston are \$14.75 and \$12.75 (includes \$.25 user's fee), and are on sale at the

Civic Auditorium, Brandeis and TIX or charge by phone by calling 342-7107.

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