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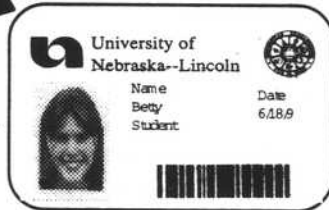


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'Wood' a sentimental look at lives, loves

BY PATRICK KELLY
Film critic

While the title might suggest otherwise, this film is a remarkably sentimental look at coming of age.

The film centers upon the friendship of three young men and their acceptance of adulthood. The story is told from the perspective of Mike (Omar Epps) who reflects on the changes his life has taken. The cause for his introspection is the wedding of one of his best friends, Roland (Taye Diggs). When Roland is a no-show at his own wedding it's up to Mike and Slim (Richard T. Jones) to bring him to his senses.

Mike's recollections are brought to the screen in a series of flashbacks to his teenage years in the late 1980's. Mike moved to "the Wood" (Inglewood, CA) from North Carolina at age 14. A witty, but shy Mike meets Roland and Slim, two street smart kids who take Mike under their collective wing. Through the course of their friendship the three will survive fights, robberies and entanglements with the opposite sex.

Director Rick Famuyiwa's debut is a very promising one. The chemistry between the actors is a strong asset to the film. Famuyiwa's use of flashback is another strength. Although the transitions are somewhat obvious at times (the use of late '80's R&B coupled with the visual of

The Facts

Title: "The Wood"
Stars: Omar Epps, Taye Diggs, Richard T. Jones
Director: Rick Famuyiwa
Rating: R (language, sexuality)
Grade: A-
Five Words: Growing up without growing apart

a spinning record) they still carry the story along and never seem out of place.

The difference between this film and other films which make use of flashbacks is the fact that the present time is used solely for reflective purposes. However, in this film, the characters go through a growth process that lasts the entire film. The three learn that although marriage would change their lives it ultimately would not change their friendship.

The film also deals with the issues of sexuality in a responsible fashion. While growing up, the three learn that sex is more than a conquest. The film may be explicit at times, but it is done in a fairly realistic manner.

While "The Wood" may deal specifically with the African-American culture, the themes are of universal interest. The movie deals with life and love in a comical and genuinely endearing way.

Rock's latest CD uneven in humor department

BY SEAN MCCARTHY
Staff writer

Chris Rock has already proved to be one of the most intelligent comedians to emerge from "Saturday Night Live." After a string of sub-par movies (from an ex-SNL alumnus, no way!), Rock got a chance to show his talents by releasing "Bring the Pain" and appearing as a correspondent for "Politically Incorrect."

It looked like Rock was ready to join the ranks of Richard Pryor and George Carlin. Unfortunately, it sounds like Rock has listened to a few too many Death Row records before making his latest incarnation, "Bigger and Blacker."

Far too many unfunny musical interludes and few too many rants are just some of the problems on "Bigger and Blacker." Prince Paul may have been a great producer to snag for this album, but Rock would have done a far better job producing the album himself. Maybe then, we wouldn't have to deal with the eye-rolling "Monica Interview" track.

Rock has always been good at being timely, and he does show glimpses of his previous hard-edged genius. His rants about the events in Littleton, CO., though a tad unoriginal, are still very funny.

However, a huge portion of "Bigger and Blacker" deals with the beaten-to-death Clinton-Monica scandal. From Jay Leno to Jim Rome, everyone has given their take of last year's longest joke. Rock's insights are meant to be fresh, but they just make you wince, expecting a cigar joke.

School shootings and the most recent political sex scandals may have the half life of a summer blockbuster movie, but jokes about relationships and racism will always be timeless. And Rock redeems himself, slightly, when he sticks to these topics.

On topics like affirmative action, Rock shows he can still agitate. "White people say 'We're losing everything, we're losing everything', you ain't losing s***!" Rock blasts. He continues by saying blacks haven't "won" anything paranoid white people think they've lost.

If you're a Chris Rock fan, definitely try to check out this special on HBO. There, you can have the benefit of seeing Rock physically act out some of the best material in "Bigger & Blacker."

Unfortunately, the listener is penalized for buying "Bigger & Blacker" by having to endure far too many unfunny musical interludes. They only serve to break up the flow Rock tries to establish during his stand up performances. It's a bad decision by an artist who we've become accustomed to avoiding such pratfalls.

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