

# Young director's feature debut a family affair

By WYNDHAM WISE

**S**he's Got To Have It, part of the Festival of Festivals' 20/20 series, is the first feature film by the young (29) American director, writer and editor, Spike Lee. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Lee attended New York University's Graduate Film School and completed a couple of shorts before embarking on this stylish black and white film, shot in only 12 days on a miniscule budget of \$150,000.

She's Got To Have It, like many ambitious Film School films, is a family affair, financed by Lee's grandmother, with music by Bill Lee, his father (and noted jazz musician in his own right), while Spike makes an appearance as a randy cyclist who shares a very sexual relationship with an attractive New York layout artist. The "she" of the title is Nola Darling, an independent woman of the '80s who thrives on her freedom as a total woman, yet has the time in her work schedule to

maintain an intimate relationship with three men—Mars Blackmon (Lee), Greer Childs, a successful, narcissistic male model with a Jag, and Jamie Overstreet, a sensitive, overly sincere Mr. Nice Guy.

Nola's bed is her altar, complete with candles, and much of the film is shot in her apartment. In her world there are two types of men—"the decent ones and the dogs." She only allows the decent ones into her life and she only makes love to them in

her bed, which she refers to as "magical."

At first the complex relationship between characters works smoothly. There is a lot of talk, some sex (nothing very explicit) and much warmth and good humour. However, when Greer wants Nola all to himself things start to get difficult. She won't be dominated and can't make a commitment. Greer calls her sick and advises professional help, which she takes. This only makes her depressed and she eventually goes through the process of rejecting all three men. Although Nola briefly returns to Jamie, she ultimately ends up living alone. She concludes, "I don't believe in regrets. It's really about control—my body, my mind. Who's gonna own it? Them or me? I have got to have it."

Nola is a delightfully fresh creation, free of feminist cant and convoluted sexual politics. Lee's direction makes the most of her enticing beauty and finds her a very sympathetic character. Her selfish whims become enduring as the three men are no longer extensions of her complex personality. As Greer bitterly notes, "She has a lover with three

heads, six arms, six legs and three penises."

By avoiding a political point of view with which to pigeon-hole Nola, Lee has stripped the film of depth and over-compensates with the cute and clever. This is especially true when it comes to his own character, Mars, who wears oversized sneakers, a large sign around his neck with his name on it, and provides a running commentary throughout the film in the style of a comic observer.

In fact, much about this film is self-conscious and arty, although done in a breezy, quasi-documentary style. The extensive use of talking heads, the black and white photography, and quick cutting are all very reminiscent of the early Godard, while the framing, reflective story line and deliberate posing demonstrate a very strong European influence. With this brash first effort, a great musical score, and very fine photography by Ernest Dickerson, who shot *Brother From Another Planet* for John Sayles, Spike Lee is certainly a talent to be watched.



Tracy Camila Johns and Redmon Hides discuss philosophy in Nola's "magical bed."

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