

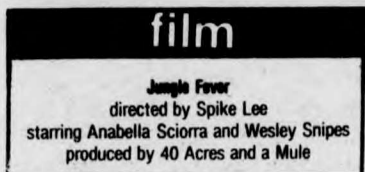
Interracial relationships not black and white

By Jennifer Holness

Since the 1990 release of *Mo'Nasty*, Spike Lee indicated that his next film would blow the lid off middle America's collective consciousness. Lee warned that *Jungle Fever* would address interracial love, and would be highly controversial.

Interracial relationships are a poignant issue for the black community. There are many blacks who embrace interracial love, while others adamantly oppose it. Those who disapprove feel brothers and sisters involved with a white person are "sellouts," "lost," or "unconscious." Given the lack of consensus in the black community, many were anxious to see where Lee is coming from.

Lee's film is extremely thought-provoking. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* this film is not. Thank-



fully, Lee does not present a polite, liberal film about the trials of getting whites to accept blacks as suitable mates, nor does he rely on the time-worn "love conquers all" cliché. Rather, Lee questions this popularized Hollywood theme by examining the nature of that love itself. What he presents is not pretty.

In *Jungle Fever* Lee has chosen to explore the factors he feels form the foundation for many interracial relationships, namely, the sexual myths that exist about both blacks and whites. Lee analyzes concepts that blacks have come to accept about beauty and sexual

and social desirability.

In the June issue of *Vanity Fair* Lee explains: "love has nothing to do with it. For white women it's this whole sexual myth of the black man. And for black men it's been pounded in since the time they could think that the white woman is the epitome of beauty. So lots of black men have this craving for white women."

These ideas are best expressed in a partially improvised, partially

scripted scene. Drew (Lionel McKee) a mixed (both black and white) woman, shares with her girlfriends the pain, anger and difficulty of living in a society where white is the ideal.

Lee avoids delivering a completely one-sided film by acknowledging that genuine caring and love can exist in an interracial relationship. Lee shows us a second interracial relationship and in a stroke of brilliance has a

newspaper headline declare this is "doing the right thing."

Jungle Fever is not an easy film to watch. It is a painful, sometimes brutal, but honest film about the hows and whys of black-white interracial relationships. The film reflects Lee's personal opinions, but in doing so it provides food for thought especially for those considering, or involved in interracial relationships.



Anabella Sciorra and Wesley Snipes star in Spike Lee's new joint, *Jungle Fever*. The film, about interracial relationships, has a lot to say about love.

Forty million dollars too many

by Azad Majeed

This is the kind of movie that forces you to think in moral terms: how much is a laugh worth, anyway? Would you believe \$50 million?

I find it sad that Bruce Willis (read: Hollywood) can spend \$50 million on a lame movie when I can't afford to finish covering my sofa with plastic.

Hudson Hawk is a movie about this guy named Hudson Hawk, played by Bruce "I have a cute grin" Willis. Hawk is a cat burglar—*fifty million dollars!* *Jesus Christ, they spent fifty million dollars!*—ahem, excuse me. I get carried away.

H. H. is just getting out of prison . . . oh yeah, before this there is some crap about Leonardo Da Vinci and a machine that turns ordinary metals into gold . . . anyway, H. H. gets out of prison and—yipes! *Fifty million! Did you hear me? Five oh million!*



Again, I apologize.

He is coerced by some tough guys to pull one last job. Along with his best friend and partner, Tommy "Five Tone" (played well, as usual, by Danny Aiello), H. H. breaks into an art gallery which houses a small sculpture by good old Leo Da.

Then . . . well, I wouldn't want to ruin the plot for you (fat chance). Suffice to say that Bruce gets involved in all kinds of shit and is witty and handsome throughout.

Hudson Hawk does have some funny moments, especially those which feature Sandra Bernhard and the excellent Richard E. Grant as typically eccentric villains. However, even at its funni-

est it doesn't compare with moderately-priced SCTV. Even with the talents of director Michael Lehmann and screenwriter Daniel Waters (the dynamic duo who brought you the exemplary *Heathers*), *Hudson Hawk* cannot pull itself out of the 'I'll wait for it to come out on video' category.

And now, here are the top five things I would do with \$50 million (I was going to make it 10, but I'm not that funny):

5. Have a plastic surgeon make me look more like Elvis.
4. Get some friends (finally).
3. Buy Capital Records and immediately tear up The Pet Shop Boys' recording contract.
2. Start my own Hair Club for Men and hire Gavin MacLeod to do ads where he discusses the pain and embarrassment of losing his hair in front of millions of people.
1. Spend \$49,999,000 on a lame movie; give the rest to charity.

Cold cowboys, gay balls and fake doctors: fun at the reps

by Ira Nayman

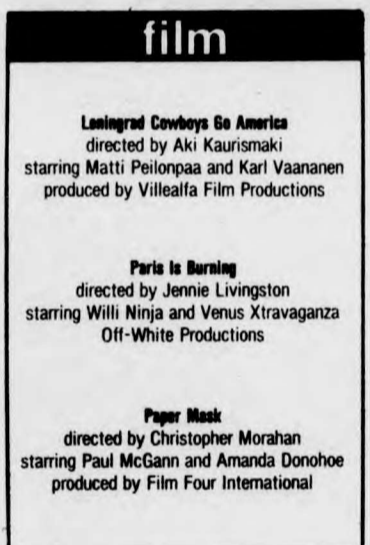
One of the cardinal rules of film reviewing is not to make generalizations about a nation's films.

Fortunately, I like seeing rules broken. Thus: I have noticed that, generally, Scandinavian films share a couple of characteristics: they contain stunning visual images and they follow a rhythm unlike anything found in North America.

Leningrad Cowboys Go America is a typical case.

It is the story of a musical band from "somewhere in the tundra, in no-man's-land" who are so bad they have no choice but to come to the US to make their fortune. It is an episodic road movie that follows the band through the heartland of America, adopting and discarding musical styles to fit the taste of their audience.

The band itself has an interesting look: hair in spikes sticking out a foot from their heads; shoes with similar spikes; black suits; dark glasses. This becomes a running joke throughout the film: there is a hilarious shot, for instance, of the band on a Sunday



off, staring longingly at a tractor ploughing a field.

The bizarre images feed the deadpan humour, which has been described as "cool." Some jokes take a long time to develop, a change from the North American joke-punchline-topper routine; other jokes are complete non-sequiturs.

The dry sense of humour works best when the jokes are totally

unexpected, but it sometimes slows the flow. There is a scene where the band, taking a break from travelling, sits at a bench watching people wheel a car engine away. "I wonder what idiot they stole that from," the band's manager asks.

Had they cut to the band looking into the hole where their engine used to be, the joke would have been okay. But director Aki Kaurismaki inserted a shot of the band in the car, the driver getting no response as he turns the key to the ignition. This was bad comedic timing: it gave the audience a chance to guess the joke before the punchline, effectively killing it.

Fortunately, *Leningrad Cowboys* succeeds more often than it fails. It's not to everybody's taste, of course; if you prefer the fast-paced North American brand of comedy you probably won't like it. Still, I recommend it.

After all, I like seeing rules broken.

You're black or latino. You're poor. You're gay or transsexual.

In a society which persecutes and marginalizes each group, how does a member of all three find self-respect?

According to Jennie Livingston's bracing documentary *Paris Is Burning*, the answer can be found in balls—social gatherings where gay men of colour perform. The balls, which Livingston filmed in New York in the late 1980s, allow them to take on a number of roles, from fashion beauty to butch queen, from yuppie to military man, in an atmosphere of acceptance.

Livingston's film outlines different aspects of the ball scene, including "reading" (a competition to see who can make the more creative put-down) to living in a "house" (sometimes a reference to a physical dwelling, mostly an



Paul McGann (left) practices his compassionate bedside manner in the film *Paper Mask*. Jimmy Yuill (not left) is in the movie too.

extended family). The most familiar aspect of the balls, thanks to Madonna and Malcolm McLaren, is voguing, stop-and-start dancing that resembles the poses of fashion magazines.

The houses are an important aspect of the gay scene: they give the men, often for the first time in their lives, a place where they can be accepted for who they are. Although they are sometimes referred to as "gangs" in the film (and some of the dancing involves competition between houses), they are mostly portrayed as surrogate families for those who have been rejected by their biological families.

The balls are more problematic. When in costume, the men are judged for their "realness," their ability to portray the category they are in without showing a trace of their transsexuality. While this can be seen as satire of dominant sex roles, it can also be interpreted as a denial of who the men really are, perhaps even a yearning, on some level, to accept those roles.

Paris Is Burning does not examine these issues too closely. It is a celebration of the balls and the men who attend them. Without voice-over narration, the film allows the men to describe their own lives. Although they are disadvantaged many times over, these men are, for the most part, not bitter; they speak with warmth and humour.

Paris Is Burning is an excellent introduction to the lives of gay men of colour in New York, and, for them, another validation of their right to exist.

It's every patient's nightmare: what if the person examining you isn't really a doctor? It's also the story of the engaging, scary film *Paper Mask*.

Paul McGann ("I" in *Withnail and I*) plays a hospital porter who is fed up with low wages and lack of respect from the doctors. When one of them dies in front of him, McGann steals the doctor's papers and his identity.

Although McGann stars, the film belongs to Amanda Donohoe (who currently can be seen in *LA Law*). McGann's character is one note (psychotic), but it is Donohoe who successfully portrays a wide range of emotions.

Christopher Morahan's direction is superb. What starts out as a slightly amoral comedy develops into a dark drama; the shift is so subtle, however, you'll probably be surprised to find it has happened.

Paper Mask inexplicably played for only two weeks in second-run theatres when it was first released. Your last opportunity to see it before it comes out on video (if it actually does) may be at the Revue on July 8 and 9.

It's worth it.



How does a hard working rock band relax in a quiet moment? *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* has a unique answer. This movie is so cool it could refrigerate the Sahara.