

Film Close-Up: Jack Black

by Joey_Berlin

Jack Black spent his first eight years in Hollywood rising from a marginal player to a major comic presence. His breakthrough role was the record store clerk he played opposite John Cusack in "High Fidelity," after which Black quickly landed leading roles in one comedy after another.

JACK BLACK - Jack Black is a junkyard worker who has to go to great lengths to help a friend stay in business in the comedy 'Be Kind Rewind.' CNS Photo courtesy of Abbot Genser. It was not long before he had a hit with "School of Rock" in 2003, and he has starred since then in films including "King Kong," "Nacho Libre," "The Holiday" and "Margot at the Wedding." And let's not forget "Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny," the satirical big-screen adventure of his two-man acoustic guitar rock band.

Black's latest film is his best in a while. From out-there director Michel Gondry, "Be Kind Rewind" is a wild flight of imagination that certainly defies convention. It stars Black and musician/actor Mos Def as New Jersey pals managing a video store. When Black becomes magnetized in a freak power station accident, he erases the video store's entire collection. So the pair set out to reshoot each film with homemade props and a video camera before the store owner returns from a business trip.

A blazingly original comedy, "Be Kind Rewind" is a zany, hilarious and bittersweet salute to what film fans love about movies.

The 38-year-old Black is married to cellist Tanya Haden, and they have one young child with another on the way.

Q: When you read a script like "Be Kind Rewind," it seems pretty far out. Did it start to become more appealing when you heard Michel Gondry would direct it?

A: That's always the thing, though. I always ask who's directing it, before I even read the script. But I really liked this idea. Michel didn't have a script though. When he came to me, he had a homemade comic book that he drew with crayons, and a couple lines of dialogue. And it was just a very simple story about the two guys from a rundown neighborhood that re-create old movies with zero budget, and it becomes a hit. It resonated with me. I was like, man, I can see that! Yeah, I can see this being funny and emotional. It was a good idea.

Q: Your character may not be the brightest but he has a good heart. In comedy, how important is it to have a character with a good center?

A: Yeah, it's key. You want to be careful not to be Mr. Goody Two-Shoes, though, just so that everyone likes you. Then you get into trouble because it's the problems in a character that make them interesting, so you want to strike a balance. You don't want to be an evil dude but you also don't want to be squeaky clean.

Q: If you could rewind your career, what films would you like to do?

A: I'd like to go back and do the old Jack Nicholson movies. I just love "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and "The Shining." Just the kind of guys that aren't really working in the fabric of society, he did that the best. And those are the characters that I like to play, too. So those would be fun to do.

Q: Were you able to bring your baby boy to the set while you were filming?

A: Yeah, I do love to have the babe wherever I go. But it's kind of hard because the set requires quiet. You can't really tell him to be quiet. He's only a year and a half old. He's going to blurt out. But in between takes, back at the trailer, it's cool to have him there sometimes.

Q: Your on-screen image is zany, but off-screen you are not so amped up. Do you get people expecting you to be a wild guy?

A: Oh yeah! All the time. People come up, yelling at me, thinking that that's going to make us best friends. No. Not into that. I am pretty mellow, I'm pretty chill.

Q: Are you interested in transitioning from funny roles to more serious ones?

A: No, I'm just trying to keep it going, to be honest with you. I like making movies and I'm not really picky about the genre. I'll make a drama if there's something interesting out there that's available. But I don't put that ahead of any other kind of movie.

Q: Michel Gondry is a musician, Mos Def is a musician and you are too. Did the three of you have any spontaneous jam sessions?

A: No, we never broke into a jam session. We really should have because you're right, with all that music, how did we not form a band? What would we have been called?

Q: Speaking of bands, is there any news for Tenacious D fans? Any album coming up?

A: Um, we've been writing. We've got a new song called "Death Star" and hopefully George Lucas will not sue us. But it's so good. Now we just need to write, like, 13 more songs to go with "Death Star." So I'm thinking the album's going to come out in the Tens: 2010 or 11 or 19. Somewhere in the Tens.

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