

DVD Select: 25 years later, the dream came true

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Do I really have to tell you that "Dreamgirls" (DreamWorks/Paramount, 4 stars), available on DVD this week, was one of the most popular movies in theaters last year?

I don't think so.

'DREAMGIRLS' - Anika Noni Rose as Lorrell, Beyonce Knowles as Deena and Jennifer Hudson as Effie (left to right) star in 'Dreamgirls.' CNS Photo courtesy of David James.

DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin

Even if you didn't go see the movie about the rise and tribulations of a very Supremes-like trio, the weekly presence of Jennifer Hudson picking up yet another award for her breakthrough performance as "the courageous, the curvaceous" Effie Melody White made you feel like you did.

With brass, attitude and massive lung power, the former American Idol contestant Hudson almost

single-handedly balances out the overwhelming performances of Jamie Foxx as the hard-charging music entrepreneur Curtis Taylor Jr. and Eddie Murphy as the explosive soul singer James "Thunder" Early.

Not that she had to do it alone. Hudson shares the stage with the lovely and talented Beyonce Knowles as Dreamgirls lead singer Deena Jones (very Diana Ross) and Broadway powerhouse Anika Noni Rose as the third member of the trio, Lorrell Robinson.

The musical "Dreamgirls" started as a smash-hit Michael Bennett-directed Broadway production in 1982. Ironically enough, crammed into the last row on opening night was Bill Condon, the man who would turn the Broadway musical into a Hollywood blockbuster 25 years later.

The story is lifted heavily from the stories of the Supremes, James Brown, Sam Cook and Motown kingpin Berry Gordy Jr., following six key characters from their start in 1962 through 1975. There are 30 songs and a whole lot of dazzle to help tell the story.

The other key cast members are Sharon Leal as Effie's replacement in the group, Michelle Morris; singer/actor Keith Robinson as Effie's brother C.C. White; and Danny Glover as James Early's old-school manager Marty Madison.

If you've already seen the movie, I can assure you that you'll enjoy it again on DVD, but there is another reason to pick up the double-disc "Showstopper Edition:" the nine-chapter feature on the making of the movie, titled "Building the Dream."

The Keith Clark-produced and -directed feature is so well put together it is almost a movie in itself. The story of Bennett's Broadway triumph with a cast led by the superb Jennifer Holliday begins a seamless journey through rights negotiation, pre-production, casting, costume design, lighting design, rehearsal, shooting and opening night. It was so engrossing that I lost track of time.

Condon, fresh from his triumph with another Broadway hit-turned-movie-blockbuster "Chicago," was asked to name the "great unmade musical." His unequivocal answer was "Dreamgirls," to which entertainment mogul David Geffen held the rights. How he came to get Geffen to sign off on his movie version is one of many tales told in the "Building The Dream" feature.

It will make you see the movie in a fresh new light.

There are also a dozen extended and alternate scenes to gobble up and a previously unreleased performance of "Effie Sing My Song" by Hudson, lots of auditions and screen tests and cool computer-aided "pre-visualization sequences" for key scenes.

What a way to start the month of May.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Little Children" (New Line, 2.5 stars) Three Oscar nominations for this taut little drama - Best Actress (Kate Winslett), Best Adapted Screenplay (director Todd Field and novelist Tom Perrotta) and Supporting Actor (Jackie Earle Haley). Winslett and Patrick Wilson are middle-class, suburban parents who spice up their mundane lives with an affair when their paths cross at the local park and swimming pool. Haley is an ex-con sex offender whose presence in the midst of the adulterers is, ironically, cause for concern and hubris. Field casts an ironic and satirical eye on suburban life and leaves us wondering who is without sin and who should cast stones. No special DVD features.

"Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus" (New Line, 2 stars) A fictional portrait of influential photographer Diane Arbus (Nicole Kidman) and her enigmatic mentor Lionel Sweeney (Robert Downey Jr.). Sweeney entices Arbus away from her safe and stifling life as a New York housewife and helps discover the

creative genius inside. DVD features include a commentary track by director Steven Shainberg and deleted scenes.

"Alpha Dog" (Universal, 2 stars) Ripped from the pages of your newspaper, "Alpha Dog" is the story of a gang of suburban Los Angeles teens who kidnap the brother of one of their delinquent drug clients and hold him until the debt is paid. The crew and the kid (Anton Yelchin) party for a few days in a desert shack but eventually it dawns on them that their impulsive act means life in prison. Their boss, Johnny Truelove (Emile Hirsch), sees only one way out. Gritty, tragic and ably acted. The cast also includes Justin Timberlake, Shawn Hatosy, Dominique Swain, Lukas Haas, Sharon Stone and Bruce Willis. DVD features include a making-of feature and a "witness timeline" that provides detailed information about each witness as the story unfolds.

"The Hitcher" (Universal, 1.5 stars) Michael Bay returns with another psychological horror tale about a sociopathic drifter/serial killer - the kind you'd never ever, ever, ever pick up in real life. Especially when he looks remotely like Sean Bean. The DVD includes an alternate ending, deleted scenes, fake news stories and features on actor Zach Knighton, car stunts and the making of the movie.

"Diggers" (Magnolia, 3 stars) A small, indie, comedy-drama, coming-of-age film set in the mid-1970s about four working-class guys on Long Island. They're called clam diggers - where I come from they're clambers or quahoggers. Whatever, it is a touching, well-acted film with a terrific cast that includes Paul Rudd ("Anchorman," "40-Year-Old Virgin"), Maura Tierney ("ER," "NewsRadio") and Ken Marino ("Reno 911!"). The movie is in limited release and arrives on DVD this week. The DVD includes a documentary, "Baymen," about Long Island clam diggers.

Documentaries: "Who the #\$&% is Jackson Pollock?" (New Line, 3 stars) Teri Horton, a 73-year-old ex-truck driver with a fifth-grade education, buys a painting in a thrift shop for five bucks. Despite forensic evidence that clearly indicates that it's an original Jackson Pollock worth upwards of \$50 million, the art establishment closes ranks and declares it a fake. Horton undertakes a 15-year battle to prove them charlatans and frauds in their own right.

"Suicide Killers" (City Lights, not reviewed) Filmmaker Pierre Rehov explores the "psychopathological" reasoning behind today's suicide bombers.

"Happily N'Ever After" (Lionsgate, 1 star) Animated feature that tells you what you always suspected: Even in fairy tales, real life just begins after the "happily ever after" ending. Cinderella (voiced by Sarah Michelle Gellar) must take on her power-hungry stepmother (Sigourney Weaver) without the help of her Prince Charming (Patrick Warburton). DVD extras include an alternate ending, deleted scenes, commentary by director Paul Bolger and a handful of games for the kids.

"The Sandlot: Heading Home" (Fox, not reviewed) Direct-to-video sequel is the third in the popular family-friendly series about kids and backyard baseball. Arrogant me-first superstar Tommy Santorrelli (Luke Perry) is knocked senseless by a pitch and wakes up as a 12-year-old rediscovering the joys of backyard baseball. DVD extras include deleted scenes and a blooper reel, an interview with Yankee legend Rich "Goose" Gossage, a Cal Ripken instructional video and more.

IT CAME FROM TV

"Lassie: A Mother's Love" collects four episodes of the 691 seen on TV: "The Runt," "The Wrong Gift," "Lassie's Wild Baby" and "The Well." Also this week: season 8 of "The King of Queens"; third and fourth seasons of "Dinosaurs"; season one of "What I Like About You"; second seasons of "Melrose Place" and "Beverly Hills 90210"; sixth season of "Will & Grace."

Look for the documentary series "Michael Palin: Around the World in 80 Days" as well as "Finding Oprah's Roots: Finding Your Own." And speaking of roots - the dumb, blonde kind - season two of the Hugh Hefner fantasy series "The Girls Next Door."

FROM THE VAULTS

"The Tyrone Power Collection" (Fox) One of the guys for whom the word "swashbuckling" had to be

invented. A man's man, every woman's lover, an adventurer of the silver screen - Power turned moviegoing into an epic adventure. And he's my mom's favorite movie star, to this day. Here are five films bristling with adventure: He's a nobleman in "The Black Rose," a matador in "Blood and Sand," a Spanish soldier in "Captain from Castile," a military man in "Prince of Foxes" and adventurer in "Son of Fury: The Story of Benjamin Blake."

Other titles this week: "Fletch: The Jane Doe Edition," "Shirley Valentine," "Mahogany" and "An Officer and a Gentleman." Also, "Van Damme Triple Feature" box set, with "Kickboxer," "Replicant" and "Universal Soldier Special Edition."

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