

Film Close-Up: Samuel L. Jackson

by Joey_Berlin

Here is a good bar bet. Can you name the actor who appeared in the most films in the 1990s? With roles in 43 movies, the busiest actor of that decade was Samuel L. Jackson. And he is not very far off that pace in the new millennium.

SAMUEL L. JACKSON - Samuel L. Jackson plays a broken-down, homeless boxer, a champ long thought to be dead in 'Resurrecting the Champ. CNS Photo courtesy of Yai Film Group. Jackson's 27th film this decade is "Resurrecting the Champ," a crowd-pleasing sports-themed character piece from director Rod Lurie. The 58-year-old Washington, D.C.-born actor plays a broken-down, homeless boxer, a champ long thought to be dead. Jackson's co-star is Josh Hartnett, who plays a sports journalist writing about the champ's hard-luck tale. The story revives Hartnett's career, until doubts arise about its authenticity.

"Resurrecting the Champ," a film about truth, values and family relationships, has earned Jackson strong praise from critics and generated considerable buzz. Naturally, Jackson has several more projects on deck starting with "Cleaner," a thriller due out later this year about a guy who mops up crime scenes. And he has three films lined up for 2008, including the science fiction adventure, "Jumper." Jackson is also an avid golfer and as busy as he is, he always finds time to hit the links.

Q: You changed the sound of your voice in "Resurrecting the Champ," and it sounds like there is a lot of life experience in Champ's voice. How did you develop it?

A: Actually that's my grandfather's voice, sort of at the end of his life. He would talk in that high pitched whisper and I was always going, "What did you say?" and leaning in. It always made me get closer to him. So I figured if I did that, I could make people lean in. I actually made a lot of people on set lean closer to listen, so I figured an audience would have to sit up and pay attention to what Champ says.

Q: Champ has some profound things to say. But it is as though he is saying them to himself, because he doesn't think anybody is actually listening to him.

A: Yeah, exactly. Well most of the time, nobody is listening to him. I mean, I was looking at a guy the other day, I was sitting at a red light watching a guy cross the street in Beverly Hills, talking to himself. You know, we have conversations with ourselves all the time. We just don't have them out loud. We call it our inner voice, our inner monologue. But we think about stuff. We call them thoughts, but they're conversations. They just happen to happen nonverbally.

Q: Is Champ simply a liar, or is there more to his character than that?

A: Well that's the really great challenge of what was happening there, for me. When I looked at the character there was all this stuff, a very rich life. On the surface there's this guy who's the No. 3 heavyweight challenger in the world, which is a very high place to be, and now he's in this very low place. And then as the story unfolds we come to find out that this guy has been living in a space that's not his, for a very long time. And he's done it for so long and said it for so long that if you pretty much gave him a lie detector test, he'd pass it. He's forgotten there's this other guy in there that's very worthwhile also.

Q: Your performance is very physical. Almost all the time you are on-screen you are practically exercising.

A: It was great. You know, it gave me something to do. And plus, I was trying to quit smoking at that time and it wasn't working. The one thing you can't do is smoke while you're trying to quit, even if you're playing a character who theoretically smokes cigarette butts. You still end up smoking. It's bothersome.

Q: So did you quit smoking?

A: Yeah. Since then I have. It cost a lot of money though, heh. I actually went to this doctor in New York who uses sodium pentothal. Judge Judy turned me on to him because she used him to quit.

Q: Sodium pentothal? Isn't that truth serum?

A: Yeah! I have no idea what he did. I just know I don't smoke, which is kind of cool.

Q: What do you do in your spare time these days? Is golf still a passion of yours?

A: Yeah, sure! Definitely. I haven't lost that. That's kind of the one thing that takes me away from the world of whatever is going on around me. Especially these days, since I've gotten in the bad habit of reading the newspaper from front to back again, because I've had so much time on my hands. I've been working nights. I kind of need to go to the golf course so I can stop thinking about Cheney and Bush and what's going on in the world. The world is bothering me more than it used to.

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