

The Behrend Beacon

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# Hail to the Chief



Chris Rock as Presidential hopeful Mays Gilliam in "Head of State."

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZAP2IT.COM

Review by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
a&e editor

The rift between politicians and the average American is a phenomenon that most people in this country have come to accept as part of life. Despite the aristocratic appearance of federal government, there is still a need to remind elected officials they have constituents who could boot their ass in the time it takes to pull a lever.

In Chris Rock's directorial debut, "Head of State," the old game of politics does sometimes look like a Fat Joe video, but there is more to the silly satire than just a bunch of stuffed-shirts throwing their hands in the air. This electoral farce is laced with enough of Rock's political humor to make the masses smile and politicians a little nervous.

After Mays Gilliam (Chris Rock), a D.C. alderman, loses his job for his outspoken support for the Ward 9 residents, his political career seems finished. Luckily, the candidates for president and vice-president die in a plane crash, leaving a spot open for anyone to take. The party heads, who already expect the dead contender to lose the election, decide to pick Gilliam as the new candidate, making them look sympathetic to minorities and a little hipper at the same time.

During the first part of the campaign, Gilliam follows orders, reads the same boring speeches, and doesn't make any major gains in the polls. In Chicago, however, Gilliam's brother Mitch (Bernie Mac) tells the presidential candidate to speak from the heart, so Gilliam goes back to the speeches that got him fired from his job as alderman. As the candidate confronts the issues that matter with straightforward answers, his poll numbers sky rocket and America prepares to put the people back in charge of politics.

At the end of "Head of State" the first thing that came to my mind was, "Wow! This is like a modern-day 'Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.'" The second thing was, "I can't believe I put a Chris Rock movie on the same level as Frank Capra film?"

Comparing "Head of State" with "Mr. Smith" may seem like trying to weigh "Newsies" against "Citizen Kane." The occa-

sionally intelligent, but mostly screwball humor sits no where close to the dramatic filibuster in Capra's classic. And the politicians aren't as much evil as they are asinine. Still, there is an everyman quality in Rock's character that makes the rise of a black man from inner city D.C. to the office of President of the United States as uplifting as it is funny.

The film has a bizarre combination of weighty political jokes and campy, almost sitcom-esque humor. When a senator (played by James Rebhorn) makes a remake about the Gilliam presidential run "making minorities happy" there is an obvious dig into real-life politics, but the comment is immediately followed up with a ridiculous pan over a line of minority Americans with big, stupid grins. The joke only hits the mark because the juxtaposing recreates the absurd reality where some politicians live.

This kind of humor keeps the film from becoming annoyingly ridiculous or overly satirical. Rock's breaking into stand-up and a running gag involving Gilliam's power-hungry ex-girlfriend sometimes diverge from the formula, but the jokes are still funny.

The biggest laughs, however, come from Bernie Mac. As Gilliam's boorish older brother and running mate, Mac has the only laugh-out-loud moments in the film. His Sunday morning talk show interviews are brutal, not for Mac, but for the interviewer. And when Mac starts to mingle with the campaign crowd, his uninhibited personality makes the idea of his vice-presidency seem a little scary.

However, it's foolish to think the words Vice-President Bernie Mac could make any impact on American politics. Even Senator Jimmy Stewart couldn't do that. Still, Rock's shamefully accurate view of the take-and-take nature of politicians is vital to the laughter. The idea of Rock as president alone is hilarious, though, right now, I wouldn't be against it.

"Head of State" directed by and starring Chris Rock, with Bernie Mac, Dylan Baker, and Lynn Whitfield is now showing at Tinsletown.



# UPN's new series 'Platinum' spins a rap tale

by Donna Petrozello  
New York Daily News

It's an early scene in the first episode of UPN's new series "Platinum," but producers have set the story of two brothers' struggle for hip-hop supremacy against the oversized backdrop of the billboards in Times Square.

Filming last month during a cold snap, rapper and series star Sticky Fingaz strolled along Broadway tucked in a thick red parka with fur lining.

"I think this show hits the rap world right on the head," said Fingaz. "But it goes deeper than that. Everybody thinks of some rappers as supermen, when in reality, we've all got our emotional moments."

Launching April 14 at 9 p.m. EST, "Platinum" is the first network drama to weave a family tale into the often sensationalized rap recording business.

"This is like 'Dallas' meets (Sean Combs') Bad Boy Entertainment," said the series' director and producer, Kevin Bray. "We see the gritty side of the business, but we also see a family trying to be a family within this structure."

Likewise, it's a show that UPN programmers are banking on as a midseason replacement to refresh its schedule and get attention from young adults.

After its Monday night premiere this month, "Platinum" will move to Tuesdays at 9 p.m. for five weeks, filling a slot where a mix of sitcoms and dramas have drawn an average 2.1 million viewers this season, according to Nielsen data.

"This show was one that worked for us because it's ethnically diverse, its stories are universal and I think there's a fascination with the hip-hop world in general,"



The cast of UPN's hip-hop drama, "Platinum"

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said UPN Entertainment President Dawn Ostroff.

Series co-creator John Ridley, who hatched the idea for the show with Sofia Coppola more than a year ago, said the series will build upon headline-grabbing stories from the rap community and movies such as Eminem's "8 Mile," an Oscar winner for best song, without merely rehashing them.

"It's incumbent on us to bring something else to the story," said Ridley, a former producer of NBC's "Third Watch." "We don't want to chase anything that's been out there, because people may look at it and think, 'I've seen that before.'"

"Platinum" stars Jason George ("Barbershop") as Jackson Rhames, a father, husband and level-headed businessman.

Fingaz ("Reality Check") plays George's hard-living brother, Grady. Together they manage their New York-based rap record label, Sweetback Entertainment, whose main star is white rapper, Versis, played by hip-hop artist Vishiss.

George said viewers don't need intimate knowledge of the music to enjoy "Platinum," despite its setting in the world of hip-hop. "Even if you don't listen to hip hop, the show is interesting on a human level," he added. "Just like you don't have to know about the mob to like 'The Godfather' or 'The Sopranos.'"

"Platinum" created by John Ridley and Sofia Coppola will premiere Apr. 14 at 9 p.m. on UPN.

# No White 'Elephant'

Review by Kevin Fallon  
editor-in-chief

The new White Stripes album comes in like its title, an "Elephant." It's big, loud, and strong; yet gentle at heart. It is innocent and dangerous. It is also one of the best records you will hear in 2003.

Jack and Meg White, the Bonnie and Clyde of the grunge rock movement, follow up 2001's breakthrough "White Blood Cells" with a classic record. The duo, in the process, has redefined rock by making it fun again, breaking it to its bare bones, and bringing it back to its roots.

"Elephant" was recorded live on eight-track reel to reel with equipment that predates 1963 on a budget that would not cover most other modern rock star's limousine and bottled water expenses. Oh, yeah, and it was recorded in two weeks.

The result is a playful band that laughs in the face of overly produced choreographed radio rock by playing mostly with one guitar and a drummer.

The White Stripes take their version of blues influenced punk (or punk influenced blues) to a new plane on "Elephant."

The first song "Seven Nation Army" features the first low end with an ever-catchy bass line on a White Stripes album and pounds itself into a battle cry on an album that is "dedicated to the death of a sweet heart."

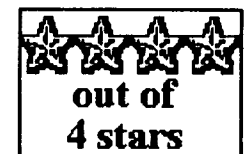
Jack White breaks out raw Nirvana-like riffs and in the next heartbeat he strums like a shy 9-year-old girl, all

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The White Stripes redefine rock.

before jumping into a raging solo. Meg's drumming is simple, yet powerful. She makes you want to get up and dance like early 60s rock bands like the Kinks once did.

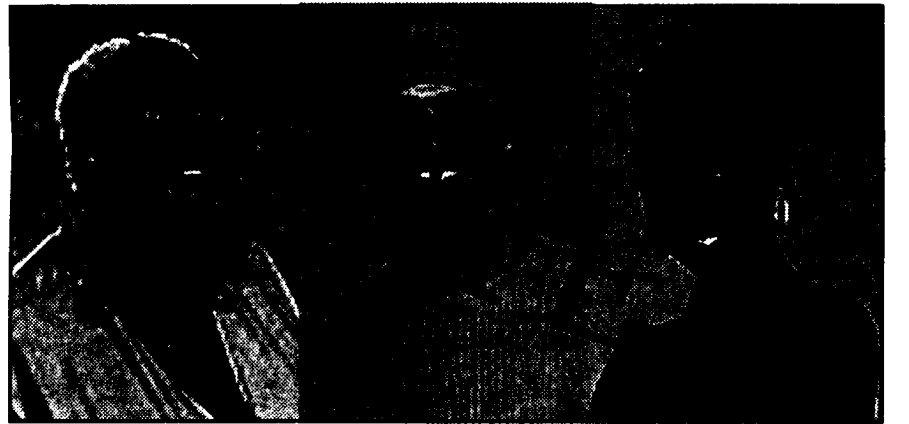
The songs are childishly quirky such as "Little Acorns," where Jack advises "Be like the squirrel. give it a whirl, girl." Or "I Want to be the Boy to Warm Your Mother's Heart" about wanting to win the love of a girl's mom.

"Elephant" adds a Zeppelin rock flavor to the band's already folksy-punk sound. It also establishes the White Stripes as one of the most relevant and important bands in music today. The White Stripes have proven that it is still possible to make music that is creative, original, real, and most importantly, fun.



"Elephant" by the White Stripes is on sale now.

# America's most wanted Idols

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOX.COM  
"Idol" contestants "Frenchie" Davis, Corey Clark, and Trenyce all have pasts that came back to haunt them.

by Olivia Page  
staff writer

The show that mimics the British "Pop Idol" show has walked into a lot of "Americas Most Wanted" controversy.

## Corey Clark

The most recent addition to the "American Idol's" most wanted list involves Clark, one of the nine finalists. Clark faces a trial for multiple misdemeanors, involving an alleged assault of his sister and resisting arrest.

If convicted, Clark will serve a maximum of one-year prison for the assault charges and another six months for resisting arrest.

This is not Clark's only criminal mischief. Wal-Mart sued Clark for \$600 in bounced checks in April 2002. Later, he was sued over a \$50 false check at a Toppeka grocery store.

Clark was not believed to have a criminal background because the producers' initial background check used a misspelled first name and did not find his lengthy past.

## Jaered Andrews

This 24-year-old's singing career was cut short when he was involved in a bar fight, resulting in a Pennsylvania man's death. Andrews was appointed as "American Idols" top 32 when FOX disqualified him from any future appearances on the show.

At the Blue Ribbon Grille, Andrews and some friends reportedly argued with the victim. The death occurred as the "result of blunt force trauma to the head." Andrews has since been charged with aggravated assault.

## "Frenchie" Franchelle Davis

The woman rose to the likes of Aretha Franklin, but was forced off the show because of an incident that she did not disclose to network officials.

The now 23-year-old appeared topless on an adult website. She does claim to be of adult age when she posed for the site.

The removal did not stop Frenchie's dream. She has signed a managing deal with the producers of the show and also held a position as a Grammy correspondent.

## "Trenyce" Lashundra Cobbins

She is the only contestant who actually had the honesty and the bravery to go up to the "American Idol" producers about her criminal background.

Cobbins served one-year in a pre-trial diversion program for a felony theft charge that occurred during October 1999. Her "rap sheet" is now clean free and the producers will allow her to remain on the show.

Many Behrend students watch the show. When asked, "What do you think about the "American Idol" contestants that were kicked off?" students do understand the decision.

Senior Megan McNamara said, "I agree with it because they were supposed to disclose that information in the beginning but they didn't."

The show requires all contestants to tell the producers about any criminal past or any defamation but the producers got their "Americas Most Wanted" tips from "The Smoking Gun" website.