

'8 Mile' provides drama, powerful performances



PHOTO FROM ROTTENTOMATOS.COM

Eminem, with Britney Murphy, is a white rapper with street knowledge in "8 Mile."

by Daniel J. Stasiewski
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1/2 out of *

TRL, multi-platinum records, and a load of Grammys: Eminem's current star status is unmistakable to anyone who hasn't been locked in a dark room for the past three years. Still, the rapper's rise to superstardom is only ambiguously alluded to in his lyrics.

Eminem's pre-celebrity life is more intimately chronicled in the semi-autobiographical "8 Mile." His against-all-odds struggle to succeed story may seem like it was packaged for Hollywood, but the first time actor's obviously personal performance legitimizes this harrowing melodrama.

During his first battle rap, Jimmy "Rabbit" Smith, Jr. (Eminem) freezes up. The crestfallen rapper leaves the stage an even bigger joke than before, just for being white. Worse, Jimmy just broke up with his girlfriend, which means its back to the trailer park to live with his mother (Kim Basinger) and little sister. When he gets there, he finds his mother living with one of his old classmates so she can get a piece of a huge accident settlement.

Jimmy's only reason not to completely blow off his home life is his sister. Instead, Jimmy avoids the trailer park by working at a local stamping factory. Still, he has his ambition to make it as a rapper. The barriers in his personal life, however, are reinforced by a group of "Detroit" rappers who would love to see the white guy out of their hip-hop world. Even with his closest friends as support, Jimmy realizes the only way he is going to make it is on his own.

I didn't like Eminem when I went into this movie. I'd heard his lyrics, read them for additional scrutiny, and still considered him to be more arrogant and overstated than poetic. In "8 Mile," everything still revolves around Eminem, but with the humility and sincerity his lyrics always lacked.

Maybe it's because this film is so near to him or maybe it's because he's actually an actor, but Eminem gives what is easily the most powerful performance in the film. The camera is on

him all the time and I expected to see him buckle under the pressure. Instead, Eminem's film debut is intense and passionate. The occasional hostility gives way to a pervasive sensitivity which is only amplified by Eminem's meditative demeanor.

With Eminem on screen all the time, it doesn't give much room for the supporting cast to fully realize their respective characters. Kim Basinger, as Rabbit's mom, is the only standout. It's not that her character is complex, but Basinger doesn't allow her character not to be.

Even the up-and-coming crowd pleasers, Brittany Murphy and Mekhi Phifer, are barely there. While they are essential plot points, neither character is more than an accessory to Eminem. Murphy and Phifer are so transparent, in fact, it wasn't even necessary to mention their characters in the plot summary. The lack of cast association, however, pushes Eminem's already tremendous performance closer to the forefront.

Eminem's role is most important as the movie tries to fight off the clichéd overcoming-all-obstacles plot. This isn't your basic success story. It doesn't necessarily have a happy ending, only because not everyone is going to succeed.

When a bruised and battered Jimmy says, "I'm gonna do it on my own," his success becomes inevitable, but so does the failure of even his closest friends. The graffiti stained streets and blighted neighborhoods will eat people alive. Eminem knows this and doesn't allow anyone else to forget it.

Now, beyond the drama this is a movie about a rapper. I don't know hip-hop; I won't fake it. But even I can't deny the exhilaration that comes with battle rapping. Not only are the scenes entertaining, but the battles are where you fall in love with Jimmy Smith, Jr. "8 Mile" thrives because of them.

The racial tensions in this film cannot be ignored. They are a major part of Eminem's motivation. Though the combination of racism and dysfunctional family life don't overwhelm a film, Eminem embraces these elements and is able to keep them grounded. Even if you don't like Eminem, you can't help but appreciate how far he has come. An obvious labor of love, "8 Mile" is an inspiration to the wanna-be and dreamer in everyone.

Trouble doesn't stop R. Kelly from making music

by Olivia Page
staff writer

R. Kelly's soon to be released album, "Chocolate Factory," comes during a cloud of controversy for the artist. "Chocolate Factory" features "Ignition" where Kelly sings about the same subject that has gotten him into so much trouble. "I want to stick my key in your ignition baby," Kelly sings. Kelly, who is accused of raping minors, is still making his songs very sex-oriented. This is not helping his plea, among fans. His many previous sex songs have put more doubt in fans' opinions on if he is innocent or guilty. Sales of Jay Z / R. Kelly, "Best of Both Worlds", which was expected to be one of the year's best sellers have been poor.

November, Judge Vincent Graughan granted Kelly's wish to leave Illinois Nov 12-19 despite prosecutor's objections. The reason for this argued by Kelly's Attorney is so that Kelly can earn an income. The reason Kelly wants to leave the state is to do a concert. The concert "Powerhouse," is on November 14 and is sponsored by WWPR-fm, at the Continental Airlines Arena in East Rutherford, New Jersey. The concert will also feature Ja Rule, Ashanti, Busta Rhymes and others. Thing is Kelly has been granted to leave the state on other occasions. In September he was allowed for a Labor Day weekend in Florida although a court date was near. In August



PHOTO FROM ROLLINGSTONE.COM

R. Kelly, whose new album is set to hit shelves in early 2003, is in hot-water with both fans and the law.

Jay-Z is also distancing himself from Kelly. Kelly was supposed to do a duet with Ashanti on her album but she decided to perform with Ja Rule instead. Many fans have lost all hope in Kelly and will not even listen to any of his songs. Many radio stations have also refused to play any of his songs.

Kelly has kept fans, though. Some of his fans proved their loyalty to Kelly by appearing in court with him. A group of adults and 40 children walked in court, some wearing Pro-Kelly shirts and saying, "We Love You" and "Not Guilty," also sang the songs, "I Believe I Can Fly" and "Heaven I Need a Hug." "Heaven I Need a Hug," is a song to earn sympathy for him and it goes, "I've given 13 years of my life to this industry/ hit song or not, I've given all of me/ you smile in my face and tell me you love me/ but then before you know the truth your so quick to judge me.

R Kelly has been awaiting trial but can do concerts as he pleases. He has been out of jail on a \$750,000 bond which he has paid \$75,000. He has been ordered to reside in Illinois until trial, but early

he was allowed to leave for Miami to perform at a night club.

Kelly is definitely not getting it easy. Singer Sparkle, who worked with Kelly, niece is alleging rape by 35 year old Kelly. He was arrested on June 5, 2002. If he is convicted, he could be sentenced up to 15 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine. He has had court dates and his next one is December 20. Kelly has been accused not just by Sparkle's 13 year old niece. There was a civil complaint from a former dancer who claims she was in the video, "XXX," which was supposedly of Kelly raping girls. She claims she never gave any permission to be video taped. Another incident involves, Patrice Jones who claimed she had sex with Kelly when she was 16. Kelly has also reached an undisclosed deal with Tracy Sampson, who accused him of seducing her when she was a 17 year old Epic Records Intern. In 1998, Kelly paid \$250,000 to Tiffany Hawkins, who claimed Kelly had intercourse with her and coerced her into an orgy with other teenage girls when she was 15.

Introducing the artist formally known as MTV

by Rachel Lyon
staff writer

Remember the good ol' days? School consisted of recess, no job to worry about, and MTV actually showed music videos.

Perhaps the biggest link to pop culture in our generation is MTV. It brought one of the greatest concepts ever invented: the fusion of music and TV, broadcast live in our homes, 24/7. Sadly, it seems, those days are over as MTV has taken a nose-dive in the form of ridiculous "original series" and the lack of actual videos. Obviously, it doesn't see a problem with lying that the network is "music television." But it did forget the music part of it.

Debuted in 1981, MTV was one of the most influential pieces of pop culture in history. Musical icons became more popular than ever, thanks to the television set. But these days MTV has almost forgotten about the artists. Actual music videos are scarcely seen unless, of course, you want to stay up very late at night or awaken early in the morning. Perhaps maybe you could skip a few mid-afternoon classes.

Of course, the network airs different countdowns daily. "Total Request Live," one of MTV's most popular shows counts down the 10 most requested songs of the day. Sort of. Actually, MTV shows short snippets of the videos. The rest of the time is taken up by irrationally screaming teenage girls and host Carson Daly's

attempt at witty banter with whomever his guest may be that day.

TRL debuted during the growing age of what became the nemesis teen pop at the later part of the 90s. Another problem. The countdown, and the network in general, bombarded viewers with 'N Sync, Britney Spears, the Backstreet Boys, and other clones of the music industry. The money making media machines controlled MTV, the way Castro came in and took over Cuba. Many musical refugees had to flee to VH1 in order to get their videos played.

But, those countdown shows are few and far between. Recently, MTV has taken into its own hands, these spontaneous creations of "quality television." Remember "Beavis and Butthead?" One of television's lowest

forms of entertainment struck a chord with younger viewers using two moronic characters with nothing better to do than sit around and make indecent references to bodily functions. Not to be outdone, MTV soon debuted the first of what would become a national trend in the form of reality television. "The Real World" first aired in 1992. It showed that the real world was nothing more than people acting about as real as you can when television cameras follow you 24 hours a day. Then the so-called "Real World" on "Wheels" followed by the name of "Road Rules." Both programs are still around today if you care to tune in for yourself. MTV's more recent popular programs include "The Tom Green Show," "Undressed," and "Jack-ass." Their newest crack at animation comes in the

form of "3-South," airing Thursday nights at 10:30.

For those who actually want music, VH1 is a channel that has music. Also, its "Behind the Music" series has been given Emmy nods in the past, and is journalistically more credible than the vast majority of MTV programming. Also, MTV2 seems like a great idea. For now. But give it a couple years before it becomes the garbage can for all MTV programming rejects.

Basically, MTV needs to get back to its basics, videos, and music in general. The theme song to "Jack-ass" does not count as music. So MTV, for the viewers' sake, for your own credibility's sake, please let the network serve its musical purpose.

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