

# Ensemble works well, but Lawrence shouldn't be welcomed home

## filmreview

### Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins

Now Playing  
Directed by Malcom D Lee  
Starring Martin Lawrence, James Earl Jones, Michael Clarke Duncan, and Cedric the Entertainer

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*Black Knight. National Security. Big Momma's House II. Wild Hogs.* If you recall that the commonality between all of these movies—besides that they're absolutely terrible—is that each stars Martin Lawrence, you've already had more fun jogging your movie trivia muscles than you could watching his latest performance in *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins*.

The plot centres around RJ Stevens (Lawrence), a successful talk-show host with some remarkable similarities to Dr Phil, but known to his family as Roscoe Jenkins. RJ, along

with his fiancée, a brutally cruel and crazy ex-*Survivor* star named Bianca Kittles (Joy Bryant) and son Jamaal (Damani Roberts) head home for his parents' 50th anniversary. Presto, a dynamic is set up that dominates the rest of the film: RJ is torn between the ratings-hungry ways of his bride-to-be, and his son's need to have a loving relationship with his family and father. At home waits Papa Jenkins (James Earl Jones), RJ's loveable but wrestler-sized brother Otis (Michael Clarke Duncan), his childhood rival Clyde (Cedric The Entertainer), his high school crush Lucinda (Nicole Ari Parker), and the rest of the family.

As expected, big-town swank clashes with homegrown sensibility amid a sea of black stereotypes and a clichéd romantic-comedy love triangle between RJ, Bianca, and Lucinda. Everyone knows this worn out, predictable comedic template: at the last minute, our misled protagonist realizes the error of his ways and that nothing will ever be as important as his family. The crazy bitch gets dumped for the high school sweetie, and a slow clap

ensues while a stone-faced Martin Lawrence embraces James Earl Jones, the reason for their father/son conflict having finally been revealed and laid to rest. Along with the characters, the plot was snatched clean out of *How to Make Movies for Dummies*.

Like a roller coaster, the film's hilarity rises and falls. One moment, three minutes of film are wasted on Martin Lawrence's idea of a hilarious orgasm face. The next moment, the banter between RJ's family is enough to make even a tight-lipped critic crack up. Lawrence is sprayed by a skunk and breaks into pathetic, slapstick tumbles. Then, again, the moment is revived by a funny one-liner from his cousin. It's not until halfway through the movie that you realize these ups and downs coincide perfectly with Lawrence's presence on camera: whenever he's present, the funny ceases to be.

The plot might be clichéd, but writer/director Malcolm Lee has made an honest attempt to pull the movie above the status of regular box-office fodder. He incorporates strong themes of family values, questions the



authenticity and ethics of the bling culture that RJ has come to embrace, and even touches lightly on the issue of masculinity and what it means to be a man. The rest of the cast put in the same effort, each managing to give their characters a little heart and motivation, despite the stereotypes they were based on.

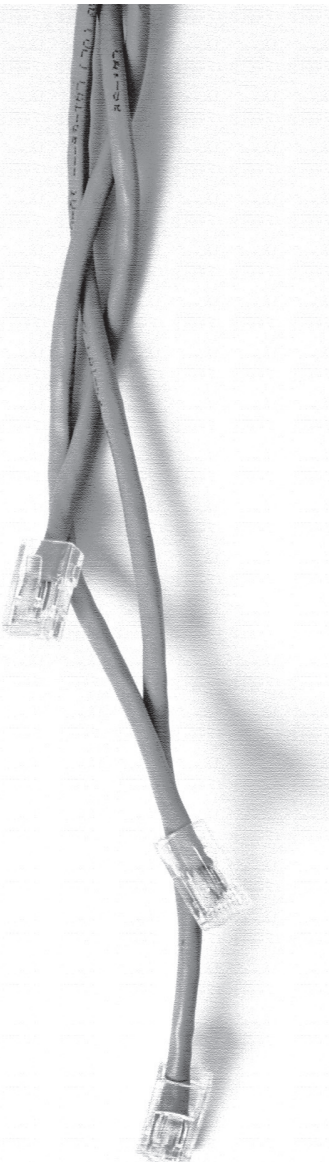
Unfortunately, there's no such effort from Lawrence. He spends the

movie portraying his character with the same zest and pazazz you'd expect from watered-down milk. It's sad that the efforts of decent actors like James Earl Jones, Michael Clarke Duncan, and Cedric the Entertainer are dragged down by a flat-line performance on centre stage, but that's the sad reality of *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins*. I smell *Big Mamma's House III* in the works.

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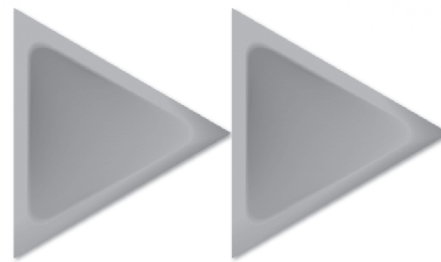
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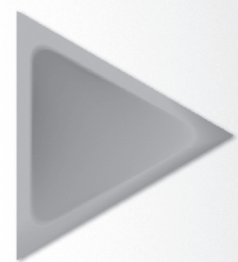
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