

The Soloist: Movie Review

Written by Kam Williams
Sunday, 17 July 2011 18:18

[illegible]

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ The Soloist

Foxx Riveting As Homeless Savant In Best Role Since Ray

Despite being raised in the 'hood by a single-mom, child prodigy Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx) exhibited such promise on the cello that by the time he graduated from high school in 1970 he had earned a scholarship to Juilliard. But unlike other classmates such as Yo-Yo Ma, Nathaniel would never get a chance to realize his full potential, because during his sophomore year he

The Soloist: Movie Review

Written by Kam Williams
Sunday, 17 July 2011 18:18

began exhibiting symptoms of the schizophrenia which would derail his dream of a career in classical music.

Soon, he had to drop out of school and return home to Cleveland where he was cared for by his mother until she passed away in 2000. At that juncture, he headed west, prompted by a delusion that his long-lost father resided in Los Angeles. Instead, Nathaniel only ended up on the infamous Skid Row, leading a hand-to-mouth existence in obscurity alongside thousands of the equally destitute and less-fortunate.

There, the only hint of his musical past was revealed when he periodically played the violin in the park while standing beneath a statue of Ludwig Van Beethoven. Nonetheless, Nathaniel generally went unnoticed by passersby until the fateful day, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), a writer for the L.A. Times, was struck by the virtuosity being exhibited by this homeless man on a battered, old instrument with only two strings.

The intrigued reporter introduced himself, and was shocked to hear semi-lucid Nathaniel, during rare moments of clarity, assert that he had once studied at Juilliard. After confirming that rarified pedigree with the school's administration office in New York, Lopez decided to write a series of feature stories about how someone so talented could end up a street musician begging for tips. However, he gradually found himself crossing the line from dispassionate journalist to friend and benefactor as he became increasingly involved with rehabilitating his subject, not only finding him an apartment, but arranging for violin lessons and mental health treatment as well.

Thus, "Can this lost soul be saved?" is the burning question posed by *The Soloist*, a bittersweet bio-pic based on Mr. Lopez's best-seller of the same name. Directed by Joe Wright (*Atonement*), the film features Jamie Foxx who does a magnificent job in his most challenging outing since *Ray*. Here, he convincingly conveys the tragic plight of a man still capable of flashes of brilliance who is more often than not betrayed by his own brain. Narrator Robert Downey, Jr. is just as effective playing the would-be Good Samaritan forced by his estranged wife (Catherine Keener) to question his own motivations when his every overture is ostensibly thwarted by the very person he's hoping to help.

Was Lopez truly altruistic, or just motivated by the potential book and movie deals that Nathaniel's sensational tale might enable him to land? And was it fair of him to presume to know what was best for a schizophrenic without walking a mile in the man's moccasins or medulla oblongata? Judge for yourself. There are no easy answers here, so don't expect a Hollywood

The Soloist: Movie Review

Written by Kam Williams
Sunday, 17 July 2011 18:18

ending, even though the picture was shot on location right on Skid Row (and employed hundreds of homeless as extras), virtually in the shadow of Tinseltown.

A compelling cross of a couple of Academy Award-winning Best Pictures, *A Beautiful Mind* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, capable of holding its own up against those similarly-themed, screen classics.

Rated: PG-13 for mature themes, drug use and profanity
Running Time: 109 minutes
Studio: Dreamworks Pictures

The DVD is available on www.amazon.com or .ca and www.barnesandnoble.com

About the author of this article: Kam Williams is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is a member of the New York Film Critics Online, the NAACP Image Awards Nominating Committee, and Rotten Tomatoes. He is a contributor to TheLoop21.com, eurweb.com and so on. He is also a columnist for www.afrotoronto.com and www.megadiversities.com. Some of Kam Williams' articles are translated into Chinese. In 2008, he was Voted Most Outstanding Journalist of the Decade by the Disilgold Soul Literary Review. Williams is an erudite Attorney who holds a B.A. in Black Studies from Cornell University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton School, and a J.D. from Boston University. Kam Williams is a member of the Bar in NJ, NY, CT, PA, MA & US Supreme Court bars. He lives in Princeton, (New Jersey) with his wife and son. Kam Williams can be reached at kwilliams@megadiversities.com