

# 'Stomp' strong on dancing, not on script

By Christy Lemire  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The rhythmic step dancing is infectious in the otherwise formulaic underdog flick "Stomp the Yard," so much so you'll want to see more of it and less of the plot.

It's good enough to make you wish that director Sylvain White had taken a documentary approach to the material, something along the lines of David La-Chapelle's 2005 film "Rize," about the rigorous, gravity-defying street dance styles of krumping and clowning.

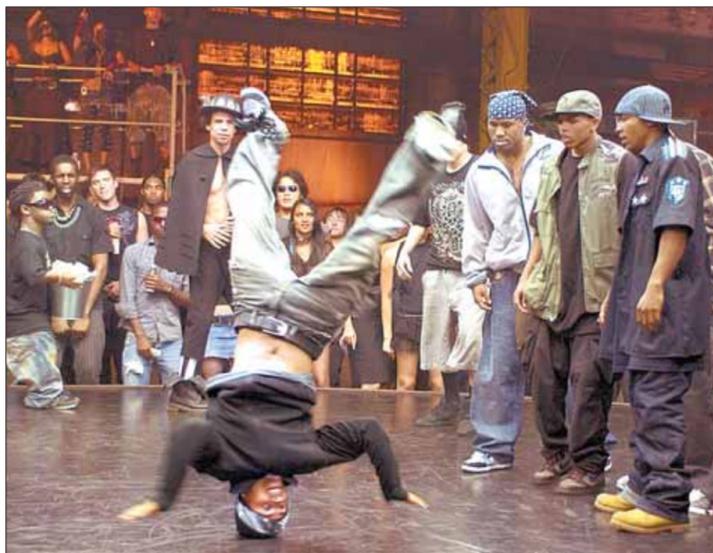
Instead, White's movie focuses on young, surly DJ (Columbus Short), who moves to Atlanta from Los Angeles after his younger brother (R&B singer Chris Brown) is fatally shot in a fight.

There he attends the fictional, historically black Truth University, where the fraternities and their step competitions dominate the social scene.

DJ's raw moves cause the school's top two houses to compete over him, and although he initially balks ("I don't step, man, I battle"), he eventually gives in, is broken down and built back up as a better man.

Short's performance is surprisingly free of melodrama, and that's really him doing all his own dancing: He began his professional career with the Broadway tour of Savion Glover's show "Stomp," and he makes it look easy.

But the script itself (credited to Robert



Columbus Short as DJ, far right, and Chris Brown as Duron, center, star in "Stomp the Yard."

Adetuyi but based on a screenplay by Gregory Ramon Anderson) unfortunately isn't nearly so straightforward; the over-long ending grows increasingly ridiculous with its twists and coincidences involving years of generational grudges and jealousy.

Meagan Good co-stars as April, the most preternaturally gorgeous woman on

campus. (White's camera shamelessly ogles her in slow motion bending over for a sip at the water fountain and jogging in pink short-shorts.)

April also happens to be the daughter of the snobbish provost and the girlfriend of a cocky, high-ranking member (Darrin Henson) of Mu Gamma Xi, which has won the national step competition the

## MOVIE REVIEW

'Stomp the Yard'

- Rating: PG-13 for a scene of violence, some sexual material and language
- Stars: Two out of four

past seven years straight.

None of this deters DJ from pursuing her, and he doesn't give up even after some totally implausible plot twists intended to keep him away.

Instead he joins the rival Theta Nu Theta (all these fraternity names are made up, by the way) and helps jazz up their routines by adding his freestyle moves to their structured lines.

This clash and combination of old and new also happened to be the central aesthetic conceit in "Step Up," "Take the Lead" and, long before that, "Dirty Dancing," by the way.

So if you feel like you've seen this movie before, it's because you probably have.

White leans heavily on his background of directing commercials and music videos during a dance battle at the beginning, in which he's incapable of staying with one shot for more than three seconds.

But he calms down as the film progresses and lets the dancing (choreographed by Dave Scott) speak for itself, even as "Stomp the Yard" drags toward its eventual predictable conclusion.

## AT THE MOVIES

### 'CHILDREN OF MEN'

Director Alfonso Cuaron puts Harry Potter behind him with a visually amazing foray into the year 2027, when women no longer can have children.

With humanity threatened, an office worker (Clive Owen) must get the last pregnant woman on Earth to safety. This rivets attention, even if it fails to dot every "i" and cross every "t."

Rated: R. Strong violence, some drug use, language and brief nudity

### 'DREAMGIRLS'

Full of strong performances and outsize musical energy, "Dreamgirls" has all the makings of a big-time holiday hit, and it deserves to become one.

As you may know from all the pre-movie hype, Jennifer Hudson is the movie's great discovery. Hudson, an "American Idol" contestant who didn't win, delivers a knockout blow as Effie White, the initial lead singer of a group called The Dreamettes.

Rated: PG-13, for language, some sexuality and drug content

### 'CODE NAME: THE CLEANER'

Cedric the Entertainer stars as a janitor with amnesia who thinks he may be a secret agent. Lucy Liu and Nicollette Sheridan also star in a movie that may cause you to experience memory problems, such as trying to remember it.

Rated: PG-13. Sexual content, crude humor and some violence

### 'FREEDOM WRITERS'

Hilary Swank stars as an initially naive teacher who attempts to reach recalcitrant inner city kids. Swank's performance and the movie's capacity to move us compensate for the familiarity of the tale, based on a true story.

Rated: PG-13. Violent content, some thematic material and language

### 'HAPPILY N'EVER AFTER'

An uninspired, fractured take on anti-fairy tales, writes Christy Lemire of The Associated Press.

Rated: PG. Action and mild rude humor

## TAKE IT HOME ON CD

### Various artists (Walt Disney Records) "JUMP IN!" SOUNDTRACK

Walt Disney Records executed a lucrative music-industry strategy in 2006, using a multimedia approach to corner the youth market.

Thanks to programming on its own Disney Channel, the label scored whopping sales with soundtracks for "Hannah Montana," "The Cheetah Girls 2" and, most notably, "High School Musical."

Disney keeps rolling with the soundtrack for "Jump In!" a made-for-TV movie that premieres Friday on the Disney Channel.

Nothing's guaranteed with such a fickle demographic, but Disney stacks the deck, casting "High School Musical's" Corbin Bleu as a promising teen boxer who catches double-dutch jump-rope fever from his neighbor, played by "Akeelah and the Bee's" Keke Palmer.

The urban/pop album is a methodical appeal to the targeted market, but not so formulaic that it fails. In fact,

there's enough of an edge to most of these tracks that parents and older siblings won't be put off — at least not initially — if they're exposed to the soundtrack.

Hip-hop meets electronic dance music while choruses brand the refrains with heavy repetition, and happily there's not much namby-pamby filler that inevitably seems to bog down music for this demographic.

Babysambles (Capitol)

### THE BLINDING

When does this guy even have time for music?

Babysambles frontman Peter Doherty is constantly in the headlines, especially in his native England, for bad-boy-rock activity that borders on the absurd.

Years of substance abuse are at the root of most of his troubles. It got him kicked out of his previous band, the Libertines. It's been an apparent fuel for his feuds with his on-again/off-again girlfriend and possible current fiancée supermodel Kate Moss, her-

self no stranger to rehab. And it's been a contributor to his troubles with his newest band Babysambles, notorious for no-shows and cancellations of concerts. (Oasis fired the group as an opening act.)

Not surprisingly, the Babysambles lineup is routinely shuffled.

Doherty managed to hang in the studio long enough to put together the five-track *The Blinding* as a follow-up to Babysambles' full-length, critically acclaimed *Down in Albion* from 2005.

*The Blinding*, like *Down in Albion* before it, is an engaging melding of genres with the charismatic Doherty at the helm.

He's ominous on an "I Wish" that jubilantly (and deceptively) teeters between ska and reggae as the singer slurs like a drunken crooner. His spritely ramble on the galloping "Beg, Steal or Borrow" hinges on the line, "I'll tell you anything just to get you in the car."

Because it's only five tracks long, *The Blinding's* magnetic music and meaningful lyrics are sure to leave many who hear it wanting more.

## TOP 5 of the week

### Television

1. "NBC NFL Playoff Game 2," NBC
  2. "CSI," CBS
  3. "NBC NFL Pre-Kick2," NBC
  4. "Desperate Housewives," ABC
  5. "Fox NFC Wildcard Post Game," Fox
- Nielsen Media Research

### Movies

1. "Night at the Museum," Fox
  2. "The Pursuit of Happyness," Sony
  3. "Children of Men," Universal
  4. "Freedom Writers," Paramount
  5. "Dreamgirls," Paramount.
- Exhibitor Relations Co.

### Songs

1. "Irreplaceable," Beyonce. Columbia
2. "Fergalicious," Fergie. will.i.am.
3. "Smack That," Akon with Eminem. SRC
4. "I Wanna Love You," Akon with Snoop Dogg. SRC
5. "How to Save a Life," The Fray. Epic.

— Billboard magazine

### Albums

1. 21, Omarion. T.U.G.
2. *Konvicted*, Akon. Konvict
3. *Soundtrack: "Dreamgirls."* Music World
4. *Hip Hop Is Dead*, Nas. Def Jam/Columbia/IDJMG
5. *The Inspiration*, Young Jeezy. Corporate Thugz/Def Jam

— Billboard magazine

### Tours

1. Barbra Streisand
2. The Rolling Stones
3. The Who
4. Aerosmith/Motley Crue
5. Bob Seger & Silver Bullet Band

— Pollstar

## • Dog

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

(Anton Yelchin), who doesn't think he's a victim and is actually thrilled to be hanging out with the cool kids for once, which makes his story that much more tragic.

Here's how this whole mess happens, which Cassavetes presents as a docudrama, complete with dates, times and places: Zack's older brother, the jittery speed freak Jake (Foster), owes pot dealer Johnny Truelove (Hirsch) about \$1,200.

He doesn't have the money and can't get it, even after begging his father and stepmother (David Thornton and Sharon Stone) for it.

This sets off a childish, destructive battle between the hotheaded Jake and Johnny and their trash-talking minions, guys who probably weren't all that bright in the first place and whose judgment is even more

distorted since they're perpetually under the influence of something.

(All these people have parents, by the way, but they're either neglectful, ineffectual or both.

Or, as in the case of Johnny's dad, played by Bruce Willis, they enable their children's delinquent behavior by providing the drugs to sell.)

To get back at Jake for breaking into Johnny's house, Johnny, Frankie and their friends kidnap Zack, whom they happen to see walking angrily down the street after a fight with his parents.

The lanky, wholesome boy is happy to go along for the ride as they drag him along to Palm Springs for a weekend of partying.

He gets to drink, smoke pot and play video games (once they untie him, of course) and even engage in a swimming pool threesome with two beautiful blondes (Seyfried, the dippy mean girl from "Mean Girls," and Amber Heard).

He thinks he is their "dog," and that these guys are his. He finally feels confident, accepted.

In the case of Frankie, that's true.

But as the days go by and Johnny and his friends start to realize how much trouble they could be in (life in prison, for example), Zack becomes more than just their little pal, he becomes a liability, then an unsuspecting target.

Cassavetes has been slowly, steadily ratcheting up the tension to this point, and his climax is startling precisely because it's not overblown.

(We're not giving anything away here. The real-life story of murder suspect Jesse James Hollywood has been in the news as recently as last week.)

"Alpha Dog" calls to mind other tense dramas like "A Simple Plan," movies in which regular people make one bad decision, then another and another, until they're completely in over their heads and find themselves taking drastic actions they never could have imagined previously.

The idea may sound melodramatic, but the result has realistic bite.

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