



## **DAVE CHAPPELLE'S BLOCK PARTY**

*Dave Chappelle's Block Party* is teeming with something that has been sorely absent from 2006's movie crop: joy. In the late summer of 2004, Chappelle, fresh from signing his now-legendary – and currently defunct – \$50-million contract with Comedy Central, spontaneously decided to throw a block-wide bash, and recruited a batch of rap and R&B performers (including Mos Def, Erykah Badu, Kanye West, Jill Scott, and Lauryn Hill and the reunited Fugees) to perform a day-long gig in Brooklyn; the resulting concert doc features highlights from the concert interspersed with scenes of Chappelle kicking back with the stars and

the block-party attendees, and the movie, directed by Michel Gondry, is a giddy, oftentimes exhilarating spectacle. It's hard to determine who's having more fun – the musicians, whose on-stage performances are heartfelt and vital; the Brooklyn masses, whose enjoyment of the show is palpable; or the movie's audience.

The answer, it seems, is None of the Above – it's Dave Chappelle. Although no big deal is made of the comedian's altruistic accomplishment here, the footage we're privy to suggests that Chappelle is ecstatic to have the means and cachet to pull this party off; in the film, he calls his sponsorship of this performance "the best thing I've ever done," and his sincerity – and the mystified delight at what his little "block party" becomes – appear genuine. (Talk about paying it forward.) The movie shows a great performer putting his money where his mouth is, and being humbled by the results; it's *awash* in generosity of spirit, and that spirit is infectious.

With its frequent cuts between the September 18 stage performance and sequences, shot earlier, of Chappelle handing out "golden tickets" to the show to fans, *Dave Chappelle's Block Party* doesn't quite get a rhythm going; we rarely see an artist perform an entire number straight through, so the concert scenes don't quite have the drive they should. But the movie has so many high points – the bone-chilling wail of Jill Scott, the ebullience of Ohio's Central State College Marching Band, invited to perform last-minute, Chappelle's hysterical usurping of James Brown's "Hit me!" which he turns into a priceless comedy routine – that its jerky tempo almost becomes part of the film's charm;

*Block Party*  
is sprawling, messy, and, three days later, the thought of it  
*still*

Written by Mike Schulz

Tuesday, 07 March 2006 18:00

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puts a smile on my face.



### ***TYLER PERRY'S MADEA'S FAMILY REUNION***

I weep for anyone who goes to *Tyler Perry's Madea's Family Reunion* expecting what its trailers suggest – a ribald, *Big*

*Momma's House*

-esque comedy featuring writer/director Tyler Perry as a sassy, elderly matriarch who dispenses home-spun homilies and withering sarcasm in equal measure. They'll get that – although not as frequently as they may think – but what are they to make of the rest of the film? What are *any*

of us? The beating of women is frowned upon, but the beating of children is comedy fodder. Christian faith is espoused, but violent retribution is cheered. Maya Angelou makes pronouncements about dignity and respecting oneself, and the camera salivates over the asses of its (voiceless) female extras. Cicely Tyson delivers declarations on the preservation of black heritage, while Perry populates his script with every hoary character cliché in the book. And I haven't even mentioned the unbelievably lurid melodrama of its all; when Lisa Arrindell Anderson goes off on a lengthy, teary monologue about how mom Lynn Whitfield allowed her husband to rape the girl as a pre-teen – and we're eventually asked to find Whitfield's actions not only forgivable but

*understandable*

– you may feel you've completely lost your senses. (Not since Tennessee Williams'

*Suddenly, Last Summer*

has a movie climaxed with such an emotional howler.)

*Madea's Family Reunion*

is beyond schizophrenic; it seems stark-raving mad.

# Host with the Most: "Dave Chappelle's Block Party," "Madea's Family Reunion," "16 Blocks," "Running Scared"

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