

How Spike Lee made his mark before X

By Jay Carr
GLOBE STAFF

One of the amazing things about Spike Lee's new "Malcolm X" is that he came to it after only seven years and five previous feature films. Even before the release of the new film, however, it was obvious that Lee was destined to be regarded as one of America's foremost filmmakers on the strength of his rich, pungent, dynamic films with their various anti-racist agendas. Here's a look at the Lee filmography on videocassette:

"She's Gotta Have It" (1986) - Lee's breakthrough movie, mostly in black and white, devastates black macho attitudes as a smart, sexy and very independent woman played by Tracy Camilla Johns wraps a trio of would-be domineering lovers around her finger - a buppie, a male model and a hustler named Mars, inscribed with humor and charm by Lee. There isn't a heavy moment in this fresh, funny, funky film. With its score by Lee's jazz musician father, Bill Lee, it floats airily along like a clarinet solo on a summer breeze as Johns melts the three manipulative macho guys' mind games as if they were just so much wax on the candles surrounding her bed.

"School Daze" (1988) - Lee's first color (no pun intended) film, in which he returns to the campus of a black college very much like alma mater, Morehouse University in Atlanta, and reinvents the Vincente Minnelli musical. The message is that light-skinned African-Americans should stop discriminating against their darker-skinned brothers and sisters, empty their heads of fraternity and sorority trivia, and get on with the more important work of racial solidarity. That synopsis makes the film sound grimmer than it is, though.

Lee's breakthrough movie devastates black macho attitudes.

The musical numbers have real flair, Lee adds humor as a character named Half-Pint, and the textures are intoxicating.

"Do the Right Thing" (1989) - Made in response to a racial incident close to where Lee lives in Brooklyn, this was the film that gained Lee his reputation as a provocative filmmaker, although this particular film was shortchanged at awards time. With virtuosic camerawork and visual rhythms, its intertwined stories boldly and unflinchingly dissect the anatomy of a torching and a killing in a Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood on the hottest day of the summer. Lee's gallery of characters is arresting, especially Bill Nunn's radio-toting homeboy, Danny Aiello's white pizzeria owner, Giancarlo Esposito's holy idiot, Ruby Dee's longtime resident, Lee as the pizza toter, Rosie Perez as the unmarried mother of his child and Joie Lee, Spike's real-life sister, as his sister in the film. Until "Malcolm X," Lee's strongest film.

"Mo' Better Blues" (1990) - Lee's first collaboration with Denzel Washington, who plays a selfish jazz trumpeter, and Wesley Snipes, as a musician with more soul. New York's jazz world - which Lee grew up knowing through his father - is depicted with pungent stylization. Lee's pair of Jewish club owners, who cheat black musicians by talking to them in living, larcenous stereo, led to accusations (which he denied)

NATION'S TOP VIDEOS

SALES

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WEEKS ON CHART	TITLE
1	★ 2	1	MINNIE AND THE MONKEY WALT DISNEY HOME VIDEO
2	1	1	BATMAN RETURNS WARNER HOME VIDEO
3	4	1	THE BEBECAWS WALT DISNEY HOME VIDEO
4	3	1	BETWEEN MCA/UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO
5	5	1	CINDY CRABAPPLE SHAPE YOUR BODY GOODTIMES HOME VIDEO
6	● 11	1	10: ACRYLIC BIRD POLYGRAM VIDEO
7	6	1	PERNOD... THE LAST RAIN FOREST FOREVER
8	7	1	WAYNE'S WORLD PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO
9	● 14	1	101 DALMATIANS WALT DISNEY HOME VIDEO
10	● 13	1	PLAYBOY 1993 VIDEO PLAYMATE CALENDAR PLAYBOY HOME VIDEO
11	10	1	KING KONG (50TH ANNIVERSARY) TURNER HOME VIDEO
12	8	1	HOOK COLUMBIA TRISTAR HOME VIDEO
13	9	1	CASABLANCA: 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION MGM/UA HOME VIDEO
14	12	1	PLAYBOY: PLAYMATES IN PARADISE PLAYBOY HOME VIDEO
15	15	1	TERMINATOR II: JUDGMENT DAY CAROLCO HOME VIDEO

● indicates fast climber
Compiled by Billboard Magazine

that he was anti-Semitic. Terence Blanchard and Branford Marsalis' Quintet play Bill Lee's score, another plus, although this is probably Lee's least substantial film.

"Jungle Fever" (1991) - There's little real chemistry between Wesley Snipes and Annabella Sciorra, who meet in an architectural firm, but the film's point is that there couldn't be, given the way the deck is stacked against any interracial couple. The trouble starts with the fact that they aren't coming to each other simply as man and woman, but that the black architect is a symbol of rebellion for the white woman and the white woman is a status symbol for the ambitious black man. For the first time, Lee also confronts drug use. There's a terrific performance by Samuel Jackson, as Snipes' addict brother and a chilling scene in a crack house. Also a vein of rich, cutting humor provided by the black women friends of the wife Snipes walks out on.