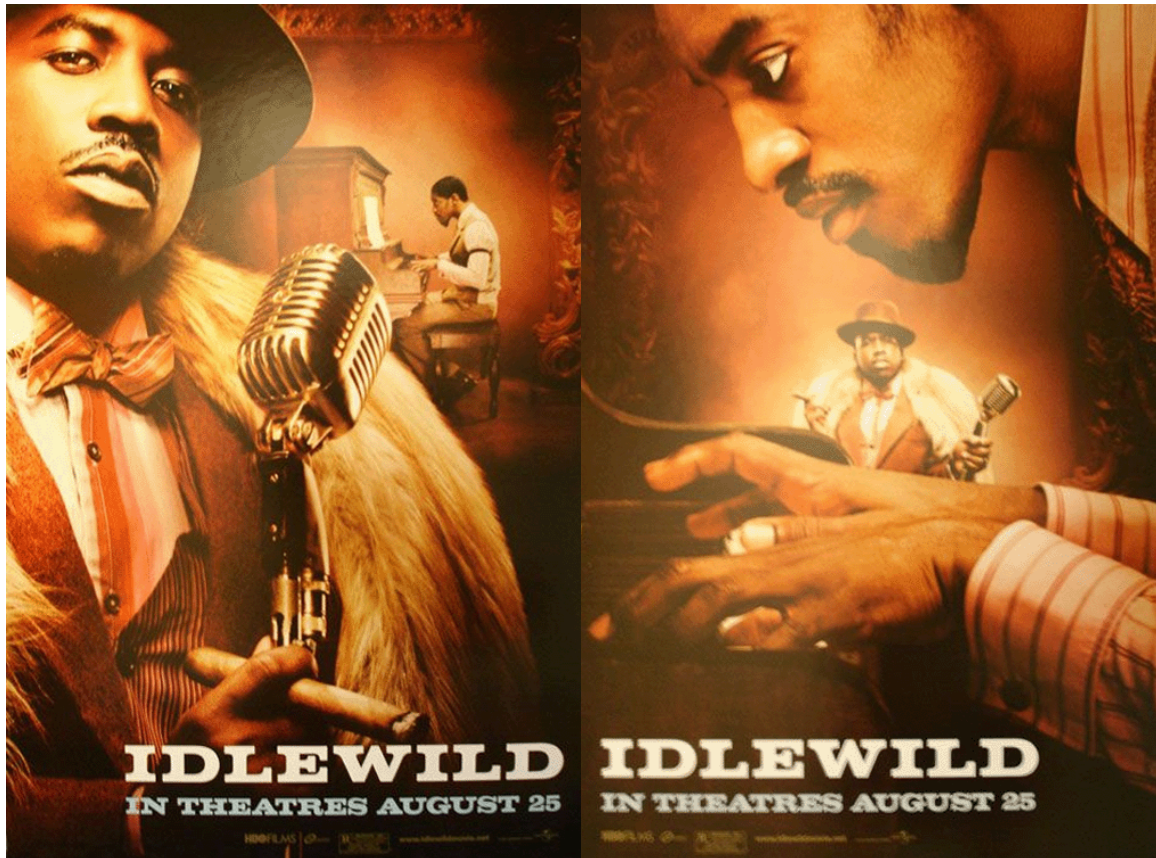


Idlewild Film Review:

““The only frame that we had on this movie was the 1930s theme,” said Dre. “We had to remember we were in a certain time period, but we still had to remember to keep up OutKast as well.”...Andre “3000” Benjamin

“It was a certain type of class; it wasn't so relaxed where you're slouched in your seat. I mean, you sit up with your back straight and you walk with your head high and it's really like a distinguished gentleman - from the wardrobe down to the cars down to how they were dancing back then.”...Antwan “Big Boi” Patton



A musical set in the Prohibition-era American South, where a speakeasy performer and club manager Rooster (Big Boi) must contend with gangsters who have their eyes on the club while his piano player and partner Percival (André Benjamin) must choose between his love, Angel (Paula Patton) or his obligations to his father (Ben Vereen). Summary written by CCC...IMDB.com



I want to start off my review of *Idlewild* by saying I loved its new “Swap” dancing and new hip-hop/jazz music. And I loved the vibrant, colorful and *Matrix* cinematography. If you are a diehard OutKast fan you will love this film because it is a culmination of years of hard work and devotion to one of the greatest hip-hop groups of all-time. The list of top hip-hop groups in their prime of their popularity who get to make a \$15 Million period piece musical is pretty damn short. Run DMC made *Krush Groove*—which was okay. And they made *Tougher Than Leather*—which was whacker than whack. Public Enemy made a “Fight The Power” video for *Do The Right Thing*. And besides various hip-hop concert films like *The Show*, *Fade to Black*, or *Dave Chappelle’s Block Party*, there are not many innovative hip-hop groups that could get a big budget film made and distributed. And to be honest *Idlewild* was greenlit almost two years before Andre and Big Boi’s breakout debut acting roles in *Four Brothers* and *ATL*. Yes, if you are an OutKast fan than *Idlewild* is a hit for merely existing and testament to the group’s unwavering creativity and unique artistic vision.

Some film reviewers might call *Idlewild* a “black” *Moulin Rouge* or a “black” *Chicago*. But this will be quite an understatement of its own originality. *Idlewild’s* main theme is more of what “can” happen at anytime or anywhere--than a film following a linear narrative path set to music. *Idlewild* is more in the tradition of a retro-renaissance *Purple Rain*. Andre “3000” as Percival is obviously like Prince’s The Kid—a tortured, misunderstood and under-appreciated musical prodigy waiting to explode. Big Boi as Rooster is like Morris Day—a flamboyant, stylistic ladies man and all around hustler. Terence Howard as Trumpy is sort of like Billy, *Purple Rain’s* First Avenue manager. Ben Vereen is –just like Prince’s estranged and emotional father. And Paula Patton is unquestionably Apollonia. Angel’s sudden entrance in *Idlewild* is straight out of *Purple Rain*. Angel basically serves the exact same role and function as Apollonia. Angel steals Percival’s heart and wants both of them to become big music stars.

One might seriously check me on comparing Terence Howard’s Trumpy to Billy in *Purple Rain*. Terence is way more over the top as a mob boss and a cold blooded murdering thug than the slightly shady and laidback Billy. Yet both Trumpy and Billy are primarily utilized in their films--to create mischief in their perspective nightclubs.

If Billy was not trying to throw The Kid out of First Avenue and Trumpy was not trying to extort money from Rooster and take over The Church--there would be no central conflict to resolve in either *Idlewild* or *Purple Rain*. Both films would have had non-stop music playing with no end in sight.

Furthermore, I did not find it odd that Billy in *Purple Rain* never put a real move on Apollonia because Prince and Morris were always fighting for her affection. But I did find it extremely odd that Trumpy- the most powerful black gangsta in *Idlewild*—did not make one—not even one attempt to seduce the lovely and sexy Angel. Back in the depression days if an ultra-fine light skin honey suddenly popped into a backwoods Southern joint like The Church I would expect all hetro-males to try and shoot game at Angel. I especially expect the film's lead villain to step up to Angel. There is no way Trumpy would see Angel and not think he could take her heart or her virtue as easily as he killed Spats (Ving Rhames) and “Sunshine” Ace (Faizon Love). And I imagine Trumpy's thugs would be all trying to get at Angel as well. And to be on the real side—even Rooster—who regularly cheated on his wife would have had to make at least one credible or legit playa pass at Angel. Nope! No man in *Idlewild* falls for Angel besides Percival. And Angel on cue throws herself at Percival every chance she gets. Angel should've had to beat off men at every turn in *Idlewild*. Paul Patton's enchanting performance really perked up the film. I was wishing Taffy (Macy Gray) had some juicy confrontational scenes with Angel after she replaced her as the star female singer at The Church. But catcalls from the side of the stage; is what Taffy was reduced to in the end. Lots of promise with Taffy and no delivery.



Just like majority of the scenes in *Purple Rain* took place in First Avenue, the same majority of scenes in *Idlewild* take place in a nightclub called The Church. It would seem simply cinematically naïve to say that *Idlewild* is a direct remake of *Purple Rain*. *Idlewild* is not that focused. The music in *Purple Rain* is a road map to the film's main storylines. While in *Idlewild* music pieces stop and go without any true set up. There are not smooth dramatic arcs or transitions to why we are hearing songs in The Church or outside The Church. For example, we hear Percival singing an imaginative and lively directed Clocks song interlude. But then we go right back to his character acting boring, dry and unemotional. What was the purpose of the light Clocks song if there is not some type of payoff to show Percival's mood or outlook in life has changed. Also, perplexing in *Idlewild* is that Rooster is The Church's top



singer until Angel arrives. We have no reason how or why Rooster is even a star singer/rapper. The first fifteen minutes of *Idlewild* clearly establishes kid Rooster as the gangsta one and Percival is the one forced to study music 24/7. Rooster acts like performing is a breeze and does not have any true concern or ambition to be a music star himself—even though the crowds at The Church love him as a performer. Even the most mesmerizing singing and dancing number in *Idlewild* happens during the end credits of the film. Bryan Barber had to clearly know that this is Andre's best musical number and it should have been at the conclusion of the film. Not as some throwaway track that audiences have to watch as others leave the theater or others walk back to their seats to finish watching Andre do his thing to perfection. I blame Bryan Barber for not knowing how to end *Idlewild* on a truly high note. Could you imagine watching Prince sing *Purple Rain* while the film's credits ran on the side?

All I can truly say the routine wrap-up montage finale in *Idlewild* is that expected more from what will go down eventually the greatest hip-hop group of all-time. I expected Andre and Big Boi would speak to each for more than five minutes of screen time. And be in scenes totaling more than fifteen minutes of screen time together. I did not have a stopwatch, but I know those times are being lenient. I shudder to think how powerful and dynamic *Idlewild* would be if I just saw a few more scenes where Andre and Big Boi were having fun. You can tell the screen chemistry between these “supposed” best friends was way off. Andre and Big Boi on a rare joint press circuit for *Idlewild* told reporters that they intentionally chose not to do a lot of scenes together because they felt their fans or the public would think it be



too obvious or cliché. They felt audiences or their fans would respect them more if they showcased their individual acting talents as opposed to trying to act together in much of the film. I don't buy OutKast's excuse of lack of screen time for a second. I do not know if the constant rumors of OutKast splitting up effected their performing a lot together in *Idlewild*. And I don't actually care if Andre and Big Boi keep making split OutKast albums. All I cared about in *Idlewild* was what it gave me to care about.

And one might wonder why there was such a long delay with the release of the *Idlewild*. Earlier in the Spring when I did a press roundtable for *ATL*, a reporter asked Big Boi when was *Idlewild* going to be released. He said in late August. All the reporters, except for me, sighed and felt sorry for OutKast. Big Boi asked why they looked upset. And the reporters said typically Hollywood dumps its losers or less important films at the end of the summer—*Snakes On A Plane*, *Beerfest*, *Accepted*, etc.,. Big Boi was not daunted by the reporters' pessimism and told them that OutKast preferred to have *Idlewild* released in late August. *Idlewild* could be in put 2,500 plus screens as opposed to being released earlier in the summer and getting fewer theaters. *Idlewild* was actually released in 973 screens for its opening weekend. Big Boi was lead to believe a late August release was the best move to give *Idlewild* a huge opening weekend. I hope he is right because I know what Hollywood thinks about late summer releases.

HBO and Universal could have easily HBO marketed *Idlewild* as a story about Rooster and Trumpy and no one would really disagree. Rooster and Trumpy's beef was the only storyline that kept my attention. Everything about Andre's performance was quite predictable. And the final outcome between him and Angel is so obvious that it is not worth mentioning. I cannot comment much on Malinda Williams as Rooster's wife because she seems no more impressed that Rooster is The Church's biggest music celebrity than buying a loaf of bread. You would think after Rooster took over The Church Malinda would have had way more to do or say as a club owner's wife. But Bryan Barber could only give her big scenes like firing a shotgun at tramps chasing after her man. I could into get breaking down how prohibition ended in America two years before *Idlewild* takes place, but this would radically change all the many Rooster and Trumpy violent subplots. I could get into the fantasy 1935 of *Idlewild's*, black Southern community and the real black Southern communities at that particular time, but I'll save these topics for a Money Train's Two Cents column.



Like I say I do not blame HBO or director Bryan Barber for what lacks story-wise in *Idlewild*. I hold OutKast accountable because they should get all the praise if the film is a runaway smash and they should get all the blame if it is not. Either way. I--on the other hand--wanted more from OutKast and left my LA press screening wanting more from *Idlewild*. This may be the last chance to see OutKast together in a film. There is a far better chance at Tom Cruise getting a new, big multi-million production deal at Paramount-before seeing Andre and Big Boi in another major theatrical film. It is a shame, but anything could change if *Idlewild* is a super hit. I give *Idlewild* three cheesecakes out of five. If you like OutKast, then this is a must-see-film. And if you are a true hip-hop fan you will definitely enjoy and recommend *Idlewild*.

Sincerely,

David L. Watts a.k.a. Money Train



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