

Film highlights famous boxing match

By Nikki Okimoto
Entertainment Reporter

Documentaries are rarely released on the big screen. They don't tend to draw large audiences because many people see documentaries as educational rather than entertaining.

If that's your attitude, you have missed out on some great films. Don't miss your chance to see the recent Academy Award winner for Best Documentary, *When We Were Kings*.

When We Were Kings, now playing at the Bijou Art Twin Cinemas, is both thought-provoking and thoroughly entertaining. In fact, it is arguably one of the most enthralling, humorous and important American documentaries ever made.

The film, completed in time to qualify for last year's Oscars, was shot in 1974. It documents the famous 1974 heavyweight championship fight between Muhammed Ali and George Foreman in Kinshasa, Zaire.

The fight, known as the "Rumble in the Jungle", was much more than just a boxing match. It was the fight that revived Ali's career and public image after the controversies over his religious conversion and resistance to the Vietnam draft as a conscientious objector.

Perhaps most important of all, the "Rumble in the Jungle" became a sort of Black-Pride-On-Tour event. In addition to the fight, a concert called "Zaire '74" brought artists including James Brown, B.B. King and Miriam Makeba to Zaire in conjunction with the fight. The title of the film reflects the historical importance of a time when black athletes were raising their fists in protest at the Olympic Games, rather than being concerned over their multi-million en-

dorsement contracts.

Director Leon Gast had to wait to finish the film he shot in 1974 because the Liberian financier was killed, resulting in a loss of funding. Its release now has serendipitously coincided with current events. Ali is back in the public eye in his battle with Parkinson's disease. Foreman is now a lovable pitch man for Doritos and his Lean Mean Grilling Machine. Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who financed the fight to publicize his country and military regime, has recently left Zaire as rebels close in on Kinshasa.

Ali is undeniably the star of *When We Were Kings*. The film shows him at his noisy, hilarious best. The supporting cast includes Norman Mailer and George Plimpton, who share their memories of covering the "Rumble in the Jungle" as writers. Spike Lee also offers a modern perspective on the importance of the fight in cultural and political terms.

Gast originally meant to concentrate on the "Zaire '74" concert a great deal in the film. He seems to have had a hard time reconciling that footage with the rest of the film, which concentrates on the competition between Ali and Foreman. The concert footage, while visually interesting, is just stuck in the middle of the film and goes on a bit too long.

A problem with historical documentaries is how to make a story that everyone already knows the outcome of still exciting to watch. The way that the events surrounding the "Rumble" unfolded lend some suspense to the film. Foreman got a cut above his eye while training, and the fight had to be postponed for six weeks. This gave Ali time to tour the country, where he immediately endeared himself to the Zairians with his outgoing personality.

Much of the film covers Ali and his interactions with the Zairians, reporters and members of his entourage during that six-week period. There is a great deal of suspense leading up to the actual fight. In the end, the fight becomes much less important as the story revolves more around Ali's persona.

When We Were Kings is much more about identity and pride than it is about one of the greatest boxing upsets ever. It is about a man who was, and still is, The Greatest.

REVIEW

When We Were Kings

★★★★
(award-winning documentary)

■ **WHERE:** Bijou

■ **STARRING:** Muhammed Ali, George Foreman, Norman Mailer, George Plimpton, Spike Lee, James Brown, B.B. King

■ **DIRECTOR:** Leon Gast

Band: New release reveals Beatles influence

■ Continued from Page 5

"The Man Who Loved Life" starts the album off. It's a pretty ballad, complete with a tinkling piano and a violin.

The Beatles influence really comes through in "Think About It" and "Trouble," both of which are catchy tunes that put Oasis and all the other posers to shame. This is what the Fab Four would have sounded like if they had lived and played music in the '90s.

"It's Up to You" brings up good old American rock in the tradition of Bruce Springsteen and John Cougar Mellencamp.

The Jayhawks rock out on "Big Star," which has the rock and roll anthem potential of Neil Young's "Hey Hey My My (Into the Black)."

Other highlights from this record include the hypnotic "Haywire" and the absolutely beautiful title cut, "Sound of Lies."

Lyrical, the Jayhawks are consistent in the quality of their songwriting.

"The Bottomless Cup" spreads some words of wisdom:

"Walk me to the bus, tell me it's alright. Talk the man out of the first drink and drive. Rock away

my terror after I burn the place down. But you know the years make things different. If you go, the bottomless cup runs out, you never gave up on me."

So there you have it. Good songs, good lyrics, good band. There is nothing more to say except that you should check out this album. The variety of moods and styles that The Jayhawks create on this record should keep anyone interested.

If you like real rock and roll and great songwriting, then you won't regret it. And if you can't appreciate these things, you are missing out on some really good music.

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