

KAYODE EWUMI SELECTS THE MASK

As part of our BAFTA at 70 celebrations we are delighted to welcome BAFTA Breakthrough Brit **KAYODE EWUMI** to discuss *The Mask* with host **REMEL LONDON**.



Somebody stop him! 1994 was the break-out year of **Jim Carrey's** golden decade, commencing with zany, child-friendly showcase, *Ace Ventura, Pet Detective* (1994), and culminating with Carrey's BAFTA-nominated performance in Michel Gondry's lauded classic, the touchingly weird *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). Along the way Carrey delivered block-busters with both hearts and minds of their own; including fan favourite *Dumb and Dumber* (1994), the prescient *The Truman Show* (1998), and his Golden Globe-winning turn as doomed stand-up Andy Kaufman, in *Man in the Moon* (1999).

But it was for *The Mask* (1994) that Carrey won a coveted Oscar for his ham-acted portrayal of a dying cowboy – admittedly not a real Oscar, but a glass trophy thrust at Carrey's rogue character by a hand from the fourth wall! Carrey received a real Golden Globe nomination for his tour-de-force performances as both of the film's central characters, shy bank worker Stanley Ipkiss, and the manic, wise-cracking monster he becomes when he dons the eponymous façade.

Notwithstanding its impressive animated sequences, break-neck pace, and bouts of infectious slap-stick, *The Mask* is no light-weight movie. Lying beneath its circus-ride exterior is a troubled, even sinister horror, just one that decides to ultimately play it for laughs.

Protagonist Stanley Ipkiss is a forlorn bachelor living in a small apartment in a crime-ridden industrial suburb. Socially awkward, he is harassed by his landlady, boss, and work

colleagues, and exploited by local mechanics. He has only two friends, his loyal and resourceful dog Milo, and his supportive and socially more successful co-worker Charlie (the late **Richard Jeni**). When fake customer Tina (**Cameron Diaz** in her debut) cases his bank for the local mafia, Ipkiss is smitten, but he is later humiliated when denied entry to the elite Coco Bongo nightclub by bouncers who dump him in the gutter just as Tina arrives to witness it. Wandering alone in the harbour Ipkiss spots a wooden mask and takes it home. Consoling himself with screw-ball Tex Avery videos (*Red Hot Riding Hood* [1943]) until his landlady yells at him, Ipkiss tries on the mask, only for it to wrap around his head and transform him into a green-faced, zoot-suited, embodiment of his beloved 1940s cartoon heroes, replete with their cartoon-power to bend reality and a mischievous and amoral self-confidence he lacks. Soon Ipkiss, in his mask persona, is causing merry mayhem across town each night, hunted by cynical detective Kellaway (**Peter Riegert**) and by Tina's mobster boyfriend Dorian Tyrell (**Peter Greene**), both of whom seem unimpressed by Ipkiss' sudden indestructibility and terrifying super-human powers. Eventually Ipkiss wins the girl, but not before robbing a bank, seeking counselling, being rescued from prison by his beloved pet, and defeating the whole of the underworld. Ipkiss' biggest struggle however is to regain his self-confidence without the aid of a demonic alter-ego.

The 'neo noir' theme of repressed social and cultural tensions erupting from the historical pasts of gentrifying American



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cities, has been profitably mined by many directors; from *Chinatown* (1974) to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988). With the aftermath of the Rodney King Riots fresh in the memory, however, the makers of *The Mask* had no need to imagine what such urban shocks might look like. The deadly violence of *The Mask*'s mobsters is therefore anything but cartoonish, and Carrey's demon-possessed character is at one point surrounded by dozens of nervous and heavily-armed police ready to gun him down. In response to the uncomfortable intrusion of a modern-day uprising into Tinseltown, *The Mask* stylishly counter-poses Carrey as a one-man revival of the 'Zoot-Suit Riots' of the 1940s; attested to when the club orchestra chants 'Hey Pachuco!'

RELEASE YEAR: 1994
 RUNTIME: 101 MINS
 DIRECTOR: CHUCK RUSSELL
 SCREENWRITER: MIKE WERB
 STORY BY: MICHAEL FALLON,
 MARK VERHEIDEN
 EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:
 MICHAEL DE LUCA,
 MIKE RICHARDSON
 CHUCK RUSSELL
 PRODUCER: BOB ENGELMAN

(Mexican for 'zoot-suiter') at the mask-possessed Ipkiss as he sweeps Tina off her feet in a stunning dance sequence. Even the name of the night club – Coco Bongo – subconsciously evokes the dark folk-memory of the 1942 Coconut Grove tragedy.

The psychological element of neo-noir is also present; Ipkiss consults a famous psychiatrist for his mask-induced mood swings (a deliciously droll cameo by **Ben Stein**), and *The Mask* gives a noir twist to topical concern at the rise of the anti-depressant as a magic bullet for everyday angst (the bestselling autobiography *Prozac Nation* was published in the same year). Ipkiss

wonders whether he can eventually end his dependency on doses of magical wooden face-mask to cure his shyness and insecurity.

Much of the verve and panache that made *The Mask* an instant box office success stemmed from its youthful and relatively obscure cast and crew. Carrey only received \$450,000 for his roles, and Diaz was an unknown lingerie model rejected twelve times at audition before finally securing the part that catapulted her to international stardom. A charm of the film, and one of its key strengths, is the showcasing of Carrey's natural genius for rubber-faced mugging and clowning to camera, using animation to compliment the live action rather than swamp it.

Receiving two BAFTA nominations, for Best Special Effects and Best Production Design, *The Mask*'s choreographer also rightly won an American Choreography award for the show-stopping dance spectaculars. An under-rated sound-track revives Louis Armstrong's 1937 forgotten classic 'Cuban Pete' and boasts an extravaganza by real-life swing outfit Royal Crown Revue.

KAYODE EWUMI

Kayode set his sights on acting at a young age and started performing at the Young Vic Theatre as a teenager. During his time studying Theatre at Coventry University he began producing Vines and, with his writing partner, created the comedy character 'Roll Safe'. Over the summer of 2015, Roll Safe was developed further and a 22 minute mockumentary film *#HoodDocumentary* was born. It was uploaded to YouTube and became an instant hit, notching up over 100,000 views in just one week.

An appearance as Roll Safe on BBC One Extra led to a BBC Three commission of six five-minute *#HoodDocumentary* shorts, broadcast in June 2016. Ewumi went on to work with the broadcaster again when he was



cast as Mr. Conway in the 2016 reboot of *Are You Being Served?* He will appear in the BBC's upcoming comedy TV Series *White Gold* and the Daisy Aitkens' directed film *You, Me and Him*, due for release later this year.

In 2017 Ewumi was selected to become a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit, in recognition of his creative talent in writing and acting.

REMEL LONDON

Remel is an award winning television and radio presenter.

She specialises in entertainment and is the face and lead presenter for online platform Link Up TV. Remel also hosts ILUVLIVE, is a voice over specialist on BBC Radio 1Xtra, a music industry panel member for the MOBO Awards and is one of the friendly faces on the fifth season of SKY 1's digital entertainment show *What's Up*.

Remel is a noted urban music specialist and her and appearances over several YouTube channels have received over 3 million views.

BAFTA Breakthrough Brits showcases and supports the next generation of British creative talent in film, television and games. Each year, up to 20 talented newcomers are selected by a stellar industry Jury to take part in a year-long mentoring and guidance programme. Applications are now open until Tuesday 30 May. For more information please visit www.bafta.org/supporting-talent/breakthrough-brits