D'Urville Martin, Actor-Producer Came Up 'Hard Way'

By Vashti McKenzie

Make a movie about actor - producer - director D'Urville Martin and you'll have the greatest black - action film ever made.

Martin was raised in the bosom of Harlem. He stumbled into an acting career after a youthful one on the street gang circuit.

He used to hustle white women for money. Although he is a family man, he actively participates in Hollywood's reputed wild party life.

Martin looks at acting as a great con game. He can curse and beat up on people. He can do all kinds of things as if he really means it and nobody gets hurt.

He has fond memories of violence and sex. He just loves to make those kinds of movies.

On a cold snowy morning in Buffalo, N.Y., Martin sat back in his crowded hotel room to talk about it all. He was taking time out of his busy film schedule to star in the Tony Award winning drama "Sizwe Bansi Is Dead."

"Everyone is snowed under here and people had to stay in the hotel. I'm a nice guy so my room is crowded — with women." Martin said. "I don't know where the men spent the night."

Martin turned his street con game into an acting career when he accompanied a friend to a professional audition. He ended up singing a capella for the producers and they liked it.

His first role was in LeRoi Jones' "The Toilet" Off-Broadway in New York and later in Los Angeles.

Martin started in the film business on the production end of films like "The Cool World" and "Black Like Me." On the later film, he was among other things, casting director.

True to his "talent and guts" theory, he awarded himself his first acting film assignment.

Martin went on to star in over 36 major television shows and eight movies with Fred Williamson including "Nigger Charlie," "Black Ceasar," "Boss Nigger" and "Soul of Nigger Charlie." He co-produced and starred with Billy Dee Williams in "The Final Countdown" now being re-released as "The Blast."

Last year he directed and starred in "Dolemite." The film, a commercial success, grossed over 15 million dollars and was ranked number 30 in the nation.

"I don't eat nothing white unless I'm getting paid, not even white bread," Martin said. "At one time, my business was to hustle white ladies. "I'm the only black star to admit it."

His role in the two-man drama staged at the Studio Arena theatre about apartheid in South Africa is a demanding one. It is not nearly as demanding as when you're starring, directing and producing a movie.

"The fun part of show business is the sick part," he said. "They let us into baseball, football, basketball and now into the sick life. And we're doing just fine."

Lillian, Martin's wife of 10 years, dropped out of the Hollywood party scene some years ago. Martin continues to party seven days a week.

"You have to give up your morals and religion in this business," Martin said. "Only the strong survive. It's your strength that gets you to the top, not talent. It's the talent that keeps you there."

"I'm the last of the new breed," Martin laughed loudly. "If you miss me, you've missed it all."

D'Urville Martin "shoots one" at the Studio Arena Theatre in Buffalo, New York.

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Martin just recently completed two films. He feels one will be an artistic success and the other will make money. The money-maker is "ShadyLady" shot in San Francisco to the tune of $150,000. It's about a young lady who "gets turned out into the street, prostitution by a dude."

The other film is "Disco 9000." It stars singer Johnny Taylor of "Disco Lady" fame and Jeannie Bell of Richard Burton notoriety.

"It's a film that deals with the disco and record industries," Martin said. "It is about a black man who comes up from the streets and acquires a record company and a disco. A rival tries to force him to join them. He refuses."

"Disco 9000" shows a black man using his brain instead of his brawn to outsmart his enemies. There isn't much violence. It's rated PG.

The real "Disco 9000" is an internationally known club in the Penthouse of the 9000 building in Los Angeles. The two owners, attorney Paul Ross and DeMetrious Johnson put up half of the $500,000 to produce the movie. The other half came in

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In the backyard of D'Urville Martin's home in Los Angeles, he enjoys a game of chess with a friend, Actor Micheal Dwight Smith while his son, Juques, whispers the next move in his ear. Smith is a regular on the TV show, "Days of Our Lives."

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