

Toronto: Kevin Costner , Jake Gyllenhaal, Dustin Hoffman And A Very Hot Chris Rock Heat Up Busy Fest Weekend



by **Pete Hammond**

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Kevin Costner came into the Toronto International Film Festival on Saturday for the World Premiere of his powerful new drama, *Black And White*, a stirring story dealing with our racial divide, but mostly a riveting human tale from writer/director Mike Binder. It's unflinchingly honest and contains a crackerjack



courtroom scene that's priceless.

In it Costner delivers perhaps the best performance of his career, or at least since the period of *Field Of Dreams*. It played to a packed house yesterday at Roy Thomson Hall and won a strong ovation from the crowd. Costner relievedly told me that even though the hard- hitting film is anything but a comedy the audience responded with laughs in just the right places and really seemed to be moved by what they saw on screen. BUT it is still looking for a domestic distributor and the star, who put some of his own money into the production just to get it going, told me at the after-party that they hope to make a deal shortly because he is determined to see that this one will be released before the end of the year.



An Oscar qualifying run is likely and that could put Costner right in the thick of the impossibly crowded Best Actor contest. Of course he already has two Oscars for his 1991 epic, *Dances With Wolves* but he has never won for acting and surprisingly has only been previously nominated once in that category (also for *Wolves*). If *Black And White* finds a distributor in time that could change. In fact when I first saw the film at a private screening several weeks ago, there were three other people there, all Academy members and they emerged from that screening visibly moved. It's evident with the right kind of campaign this film could earn some awards mojo.

Costner told me he considers Binder's work a truly great American screenplay and Binder himself told me that he wanted to make the kind of film a Sidney Lumet might have made. In this ever-changing era it is difficult to get challenging, but rewarding films like this made and they had to do this one in 26 days on a very tight budget but the results here in Toronto were certainly everything the filmmakers could have hoped for.

Co-stars Octavia Spencer and Anthony Mackie also give award-caliber performances and the Oscar-winning Spencer , who plays Mackie's mother and the grandmother of his young daughter who is the subject of a fierce custody battle between her and Costner, told me she has been "obsessed" with Costner long before she dreamed she would ever be co-starring with him.

The industry being what it is these days makes it incredibly difficult for small, meaningful movies like this to get made and find their audience. That's why a festival like this one with multiple World Premiere galas every night can shine a light on them and send them on their way.

