



Montreal

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Samoan Wedding

Sione's Wedding

(New Zealand)

A South Pacific Pictures presentation in association with the New Zealand Film Commission, NZ on Air, Village SkyCity Cinemas, Joseph P. Moodabe. (International sales: HanWay Films, London.) Produced by John Barnett, Chloe Smith. Executive producers, Paul Davis, Mark Horowitz. Directed by Chris Graham. Screenplay, James Griffin, Oscar Kightley.

With: Oscar Kightley, Iaheto Ah Hi, Robbie Magasiva, Shimpal Lelisi, Teuila Blakely, Madeleine Sami, David Fane, Maryjane McKibbin-Schwenke, Pua Magasiva, David Van Horn, Nathaniel Lees, Ana Tuigamala.

By EDDIE COCKRELL

The big, burly "Samoan Wedding" is a shrewdly written, impeccably timed and audaciously played romantic comedy about four thirtysomething slacker buddies in New Zealand forced to clean up their acts and find respectable dates in order to attend a best mate's wedding. Pic, known as "Sione's Wedding" in the Southern Hemisphere -- where it broke the opening weekend Kiwi box office record in late March 2006 -- is being sold under the current name elsewhere by London-based HanWay films. Under any title, this is an instantly exportable comedy that will play gangbusters in all situations on all platforms.

Though action is set among the sizeable Samoan community in an Auckland suburb, the affable but irresponsible quartet around which events revolve are immediately identifiable as Peter Pan types. Albert (co-writer/co-producer Oscar Kightley) is a good-natured office drone who lives with his mom; Michael (Robbie Magasiva) is a hunky Lothario with a weakness for white women; Sefa (Shimpal Lelisi) actually has a girlfriend, Leilani (Teuila Blakely), but keeps forgetting this in his enthusiasm for the next party; Stanley (Iaheto Ah Hi) is so busy trying to find the perfect woman through dating services that the world's passing him by. Formerly members of an early 1990s break-dancing crew called the "Duckrockers," they've pretty much ceased to mature.

When their local minister (Nathaniel Lees) confronts them with vid evidence of their immature behavior at previous nuptials, the boys work hard to persuade him to let them attend the wedding of Micheal's brother Sione (Pua Magasiva) -- but only if they find suitable, legit dates.

Balance of the pic charts these often howlingly funny efforts, which grow to include Albert's co-worker Tania (Madeline Sami); gorgeous but treacherous cousin Princess (Maryjane McKibbin-Schwenke); Sefa's naive cousin Paul, aka Bolo (David Fane); and white gangsta wannabe Derek (David Van Horn).

Pic's stopwatch-tight comedic timing was developed by Kightley and a chunk of the cast in the long-running Naked Samoans touring theater troupe. There's not a weak link in the sizeable cast, with each principal assigned just enough screen time to give depth to caricature.

Tech credits are pro, with former musicvid helmer Chris Graham making full use of the widescreen frame for skilled physical comedy. Toe-tapping tunes mix hip-hop and pop acts from the stable of Auckland-based record label Dawn Raid Entertainment.

Camera (color, widescreen), Aaron Morton; editor, Paul Maxwell; music, Andy Morton, Dawn Raid Entertainment; costume designer, Jane Holland; sound mixer (Dolby Digital), Tony Johnson; associate producers, Griffin, Kightley; assistant director, Joe Nolan. Reviewed at Montreal World Film Festival (Focus on World Cinema), Sept. 1, 2006 Running time: 97 MIN.