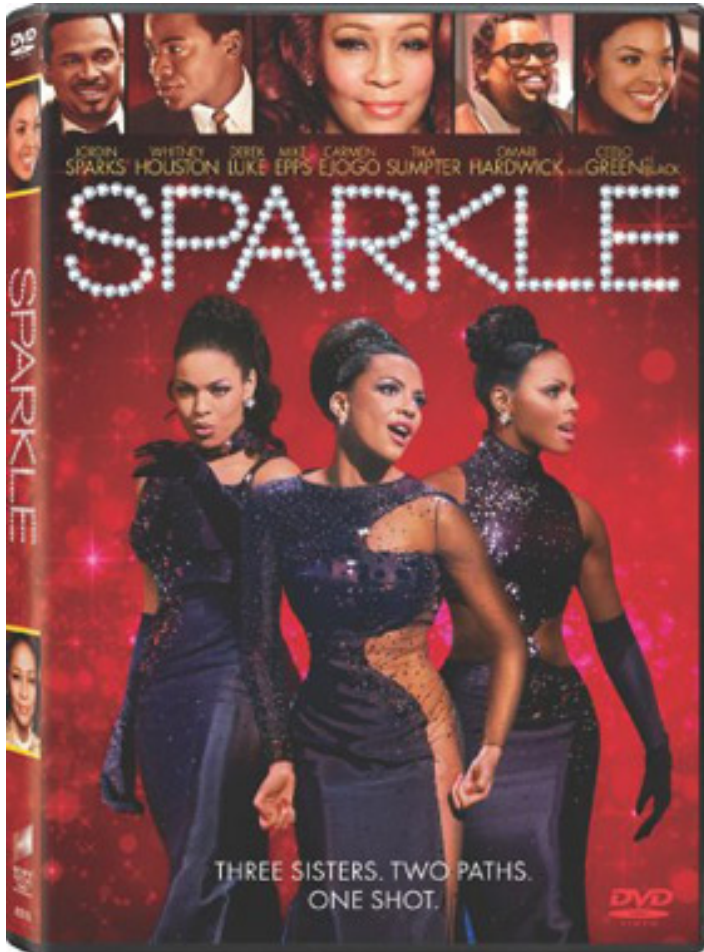


Whitney Houston shines as overprotective mom in remake of modern morality play

Written by DVD Review by Kam Williams



Emma Anderson (Whitney Houston) didn't want her daughters to follow in her footsteps by having babies as teenagers while squandering their future in the futile pursuit of celebrity and bad boys who wouldn't treat them like ladies. That's why the overprotective single-mom feels fortunate to be able to raise them in a middle-class suburb of Detroit where she keeps them on the straight and narrow path via a steady diet of Christianity and high expectations.

All three siblings have inherited the ability to sing from their mother, a blessing they put to good use for the Lord in the church choir every Sunday. However, each girl also has her own distinctive personality yearning to express itself.

Brainy Dolores (Tika Sumpter) has her mind set on attending Meharry School of Medicine. Self-effacing Sparkle (Jordin Sparks) is a gifted composer who's too shy to perform any of her heartfelt ballads in public. But seductive Sister (Carmen Ejogo) is just the opposite, being a confident extrovert who craves the limelight and the attention of men.

Consequently, it's no surprise that Sister might rebel and run away from home, rather than abide by her mother's restrictive house rules. She's only been back in town for two months, but already has a couple of suitors competing for her hand, Levi (Omari Hardwick), a penniless, perfect gentleman, and Satin (Mike Epps), a flashy, silky smooth operator.

Given Sister's materialistic nature, it's easy to guess that that she would opt to entertain the overtures of the latter, a misogynist with a dark side yet to reveal itself. Meanwhile, Sparkle

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starts dating Stix (Derek Luke) who encourages the talented sisters to form a trio and take a shot at superstardom.

So unfolds *Sparkle*, a modern morality play with a sobering message made all the more telling by serving as Whitney Houston's cinematic farewell. Several of the late pop diva's lines in the movie induce goose bumps, such as when she matter-of-factly asks, "Was my life not enough of a cautionary tale for you?"

The film features standout performances by Whitney and Carmen Ejogo, with Derek Luke and Mike Epps appearing at their best as well. Jordin Sparks certainly holds her own when called upon to sing, but she comes across in this big screen debut as not quite ready to handle a title role, at least acting-wise.

Written and directed by the husband-wife team of Mara Brock Akil and Salim Akil, respectively, *Sparkle* is very loosely based on the 1976 musical of the same name, with the point of departure, the timeline, plot developments, and the score being tweaked for the overhaul, and all for the better. A must-see, between Whitney's sentimental Swan Song and charismatic Carmen's coming out party.

Excellent (3.5 stars)

Rated PG-13 for violence, profanity, drug use, smoking, mature themes and domestic abuse.

Running time: 116 minutes

Distributor: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

DVD Extras: Director's commentary; A Tribute to Whitney Houston; A Dream Come True; and more.

To see a trailer for *Sparkle*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBXGhbpMMrw>

To order a copy of *Sparkle* on DVD, visit:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B008Y1YJN6/ref%3dnosim/thslfofire-20>