

SPF FILMS
PRESENTS

FOR KICKS

MOVIES MUSIC MARTIAL ARTS



SPF FILMS IN ASSOCIATION WITH SUBSTANCE GROOVE MAIN STREET

PRESENTS A FILM BY SEAN FAHEY

FEATURING EUGENE THOMAS, RON VAN CLIEF, FLOYD WEBB, BRYANT MURAKAMI PHD.

SCREENPLAY BY SEAN FAHEY CINEMATOGRAPHY BY SEAN FAHEY, JEREMY HANSEN PRODUCER SEAN FAHEY

MUSIC BY BRAINCHILD, NINJA CYBORG, SCANDROID, S. BRETT, EUGENE THOMAS

DIRECTED BY SEAN FAHEY MOTION GRAPHICS BY QA'ED MAI EDITED BY SEAN FAHEY



Official Selection NewFilmmakers Los Angeles

Semi-retired Chicago security guard Eugene Thomas reflects on his life, philosophy, music, martial arts practice, and recalling a time when he was an international celebrity, starring in a dozen ninja movies in the 1980s. Also featuring Ron van Clief (The Black Dragon), "For Kicks" is a unique window into the history of black martial arts in movies.





67 year old Eugene Thomas spends most of his time these days focused on his music. An accomplished jazz flute and saxophone player, Thomas sees music align with his martial arts practice; both are an inward journey for him, both require discipline, both are part of his spiritual path. According to Thomas, "what Bruce Lee did for martial arts, Thelonious Monk, Miles

Davis, and John Coltrane did for music - they were all masters of their craft, and all seeking that inward journey." Thomas spent a decade between the 80s and 90s thriving in Taiwan as an action star, and is featured in a dozen ninja movies. He looks back romantically at his time in Asia as the best years of his life. But it wasn't always easy, and he had to overcome racial discrimination, but was able to prove himself as a rising action star. Thomas has had a lifelong passion for martial arts, starting in his teens, when he took to Tae Kwon Do like a "duck in water" and began winning competition after competition around the midwest. It wasn't long before Master Yang made Thomas a teacher at his academy in Chicago. Thomas always wanted to visit Taiwan and Bruce Lee played a major role in his formative years, inspiring his passion for martial arts - he knew one day he would live in Asia and practice there. So Thomas got a ticket and headed to Taiwan.



He had no plan, it was totally on a whim. When he got out of the airport, not knowing the language, and having no place to go, an english speaking taxi driver asked him, "so,

where do you want to go, YMCA?" Thomas replies, "Yeah, I'll go to the YMCA," and that is how it began.

It wasn't long before Thomas found his way into training in a local gym and gaining some attention. Being a tall handsome black American, and athlete, Thomas definitely stood out, and it worked to his advantage. Thomas played amateur basketball in Taiwan for a season, which helped him pay rent. It wasn't long after that, when he met mountain climber Fred Mao, who introduced Thomas to legendary Kung Fu director Robert Tai, and long-time producing partner and leading man, Alexander Lo. Robert Tai was in his mid 20s and already a legendary choreographer, for the hugely popular Celestial Pictures and Shaw Brother's Venom pictures franchise, produced in Hong Kong . Alexander Lo was already a household name in Taiwan as world champion fighter, raconteur, and a heartthrob. Thomas became fast friends with them and began training with some of the stunt coordinators that work on their movies. Thomas got his first action role in Mafia vs. Ninja in 1984. He didn't make any money on that film, but learned how to be a martial arts action star. His second film Super Ninja happened right after that, and he got paid, and some notoriety. And the roles kept coming.

Thomas was cast in Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids in 1986, which won awards all over Asia and was hugely successful - Thomas became a household name. Soon Thomas would travel from Taiwan, to the Philippines, to Hong Kong, and everywhere he went he was a household name. Thomas would see giant billboards in every major city he'd visit in Asia, with his face, or an image of him doing a high kick. He was everywhere, he had made it. And Alexander Lo and Robert Tai partnered Thomas as a vehicle to sell their films.



Thomas ended up moving back to the states and settled in Los Angeles around the time he starred in Shaolin Dolomite alongside Rudy Ray Moore and the phone kept ringing - he was booking gigs but it didn't feel right. Thomas moved back to Chicago from Los Angeles in the late 90s. He had enough of the cutthroat Hollywood culture, and while he had been auditioning for many movie projects, including Lionheart starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, he realized that his inward spiritual journey, and the outward ego-driven journey of so many in LA, didn't align - so Thomas took a step back to find his true calling. Now Thomas spends his time focused on his martial arts practice, his music, his loving wife, and meditation. He's looking back at his time in Taiwan and looking at the industry he was a part of and what it has grown into.

In For Kicks, Thomas shares his story and we will learn from legendary black action star Ron Van Clief, professor Bryant Murakami, actor/producer Toby Russell (Ken Russell's son), filmmaker Floyd Webb, and others, who will zoom in on the cultural significance of the black martial arts cinematic experience, from Blaxploitation, to Hong Kong's booming action film market, to the formulation of the black martial arts icons, like Ron Van Clief, Carl Scott, Jim Kelly, Jim Brown, Fred Williamson, Thomas Eugene Trammell, and others who blazed the trail and created an excited genre of martial arts action cinema. We will learn about the storied history of black martial artists who paved the way for the many action genres today. And we will learn about how music and martial arts inform Thomas' spiritual inward journey as a lifelong practice.

Martial arts and Black America have a rich history. Jim Kelly, famous for his roles in Enter the Dragon and Black Belt Jones, was a huge celebrity. Movies like "Three the Hard Way", starring Jim Brown and Fred Williamson, who were trailblazers for a black culture that was struggling carving out its own niche against all odds, in inner cities like New York and Chicago, paved a way for other black martial artists to make their mark both in practice and on film. Ron Van Clief is considered a pioneer in the genre, starring in The Black Dragon, which is also a monicker was affectionately given by Master (Bruce) Lee. These are the movies and stars that inspired Thomas, along with Master (Bruce) Lee, of course. Carl Scott is another pioneer of black martial arts who traveled east to find their way into fame and fortune - he was a Kung Fu genius. There are many black pioneers of martial arts, like Thomas, that have stories seldom told.