

BE COOL

Cedric the Entertainer rings in the new year with a new job in 'Code Name: The Cleaner' BY MICHAEL GILTZ

Don't look for Cedric the Entertainer to be working a room this New Year's Eve. "I stopped working on New Year's Eve about three years ago," says the man born Cedric Kyles but known to all as Cedric the Entertainer.

One of the original Kings of Comedy, Cedric performed in Reno last night, then headed back home to Los Angeles to ring in 2007 with family and friends. That's a lot more fun than working a crowd desperate for a great time, he says.

"My toughest New Year's Eve gig was probably in Oakland," says the 42-year-old comedian and actor, currently heard in the family film "Charlotte's Web" as the voice of Golly the Gander, husband of Gussy the Goose (voiced by Oprah Winfrey).

"Oakland can be a tough crowd anyway. But the show never really got off the ground and the crowd really got upset. By the time I hit the stage, I probably did about 15 or 20 minutes when they had to do the countdown. And they were rowdy and drinking. The promoters were arguing with the fans, and people were trying to get paid. It was a bad scene!"

"The promoters always have these grandiose ideas. Then they run out of Cristal early on after charging people \$1,000."

So, working New Year's Eve as a comic can be tough, though not as tough as being a janitor. That's the job Cedric's character has in the action-comedy "Code Name: The Cleaner," opening Friday. In it, Cedric's amnesiac Jake wakes up in a hotel room next to a dead body and tries to figure out whether he's a custodian or a spy (while avoiding getting killed). Lucy Liu is along for the ride as a federal agent he wouldn't mind uncovering for clues.

"At least when you're a janitor you're on your own late at night and you can whistle at your work," says Cedric, whose cool delivery and big presence stole the show in Spike Lee's "The Original Kings of Comedy," "Barbershop" and "Barbershop 2: Back in Business," and helped make "Intolerable Cruelty" and "Johnson Family Vacation" more fun.

Before "Charlotte's Web," he also lent his deep tones to "Dr. Dolittle 2," "Ice Age" and



"Madagascar" (a sequel to the latter is in the works). His own worst job? Well, though he also once had a gig in insurance, that honor would be working at a factory where he had to put the glue on Pampers diapers. Cedric worked at night

and had to make sure one machine was always filled with glue; if it ran out, the whole system ground to a halt.

"It was a graveyard shift," he remembers. "I was young. And they had these huge boxes the glue came in and I climbed into one of the boxes and went to sleep. The supervisor woke me up and the red light was on and the machine was stopped. Dude looked at me; he didn't even have to say nothing. 'Do I get a check? Do I get paid for the day? I know I'm fired.'"



HAIR'S THE DEAL Cedric went prematurely gray for his "Barbershop" role.



RECORD TIME Andre Benjamin and Cedric were music execs in "Be Cool."

Now it's Cedric who is turning down work — especially on New Year's Eve. And why not? He has already had the best experience he could ever have working that night.

"Oh man, I was 15 or 16 years old," he recalls. "I used to have a friend who was a deejay, and he would deejay for these rich girls. I would go with him. I didn't deejay, but I would carry the crates

For a comic, he says, Dec. 31 gigs can be tough.

and hold the cords so I could hang out and just be a part of the party. [Everyone] would drink, and this girl I was infatuated with kissed me. I was totally out of my class! It was strictly a New Year's Eve kiss — no tongue, nothing like that.

"But the way I was able to manipulate that with my boys for the next eight years? I put a little extra on it: 'You know I kissed her! We was tonguing for a loong time, like three minutes.' Yeah, buddy!" ♦



INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH Cedric the Entertainer plays a janitor who thinks he's a spy in "Code Name: The Cleaner." Lucy Liu co-stars as a federal agent.