

'Clueless': Hits, Misses And Disses

Feeling clueless? Then you might enjoy the new movie of the same name, written and directed by Amy Heckerling, best known for 1982's "Fast Times at Ridgemont High." Starring MTV vixen (and youngest Aerosmith member) Alicia Silverstone, along with a handful of other cuties, this film tells the tale of... well, very little.

But unlike, say, "Pulp Fiction," in which the lack of a direct plot motivated story seems irrelevant, "Clueless" suffers from its incoherence and the notion that teen slang is story enough for a major motion picture.

Playing like a 95 minute "Saturday Night Live" Gap Girls skit, "Clueless" meanders all over the map only to find its way back to a conventional ending that seems more than a bit forced.

Silverstone pouts and charms her way through as Cher, an extremely rich and fashion-conscious caricature of a high school girl. Her best friend is Dionne (Stacey Dash), and their lives are the usual teen whirlwind of shopping, relationships and gossip.

Visually, the film can be summed up quite easily: think colorful. The outfits, which show up in seizure-inducing hues of red, yellow and blue, are meant to be comic excess and Cher's overstocked closet would make even the "90210" kids look downright poverty-stricken.

As mentioned, there is no real direction to the story, unless you include the introduction of Ty, "the new girl," whom Dionne and Cher adopt into their circle and attempt to make over. And eventually Cher does make a realization about love, but with all the swapping and the indecision that goes on through the movie, it's not exactly the most convincing of end-



Alicia Silverstone, best-known as "that girl in the Aerosmith videos," turns in a bubbly performance as Cher, a well-off Beverly Hills high-schooler, in Amy Heckerling's "Clueless."

ings. The story, however, is not the main point of this affair — the script seems mainly interested in working conversations out of one-liners and teen vernacular, but the bubbly dialogue and quick-witted snippets somehow aren't always as funny as they could be if they came from characters that had real personality.

Still, there are some undeniably funny moments that stem from a real sense of laissez-faire production. This movie may be "Clueless," but you get the feeling that Heckerling still understands the naive petu-

lance and slacker element of the younger generation that she portrays.

The problem is that the entire film plays like a slightly more cerebral episode of "House of Style." Featuring neat teen disses and a soundtrack that includes Coolio, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones and Counting Crows, "Clueless" manages to come across as more cool in theory than in substance.

I had the odd experience of seeing "Clueless" the same day as my 14-year-old sister. Upon learning that I had seen it, my sister bounded into the room, enthusiasm

that only a young high school girl can muster gushing forth. "Omigod, wasn't that funnier than a mob scene? Wicked, to be sure!"

And while I'm still working on the logistics of that comparison and the specifics of her argument, that single moment may be a better indication of this movie that anything that I could ever write.

"Clueless" is the latest studio stab at teen comedy, and the first such film in a long time centered at girls. And while not without problems, "Clueless" may just have hit its mark.

Artist Out of Control Drives 'Wonder Boys'

Michael Chabon is a young writer who looks like a fifth-year senior on the cover sleeve of his new novel. He's been dubbed a Brat Pack writergoer with Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney; more out of the literary critics' need to set writers up in imaginary little guilds than anything else.

That said, "Wonder Boys" does leave those other young bucks rocking in his wake. "Wonder Boys" is a beautifully written, fully realized novel about the perpetual atmosphere of failure that Graham Greene claims all artists live in.

Grady Tripp is an aging novelist and professor whose status as a 'wonder boy' is a distant pot-added memory and whose magnum opus, also titled "Wonder Boys," is proving to be as long-winded as a semester of dull lectures and as unmanageable as his life. Tripp has been working on "Wonder Boys" for the past seven years and has not yet reached even its projected midway point, even though it is about the size of A-P of the World Book Encyclopedia.

His life is falling apart in ways that we'll

leave for the novel to describe. Everyone he knows is creating fictions of their lives, fictions he is eagerly an accomplice in. His best friend, publisher/raconteur Terry Crabtree, raises all kinds of hell in his effort to "write his name on water." His most talented student, whose fictions are as sharp and condensed as Tripp's are bloated, is a pathological liar obsessed with Hollywood suicides.

And Tripp's former experience with the writer's life, the suicide of the obscure horror writer living upstairs in his mother's boarding house, is told lovingly with the punchline, "He set a kind of example that, as a writer, I've been living up to ever since. I only hope that I haven't invented him."

Even his drug of choice, marijuana in Carlos Santana-sized volumes, is used as an aid to help him make narrative sense of his life. Spy or some such other glossy mag drew up a list in the heyday of the megafictionists of 10 ways to tell if you're reading a postmodern novel. One of the 10 glib clues was if the novel contains a novel within a novel. This one contains several, but the device is neither trite nor over-clever. It's a tender and rolling tribute to a life and an art out of control.

DAVID PATTERSON

Book Review
"Wonder Boys"

Arts & Entertainment Calendar

THURSDAY, JULY 27

GRAVITY'S PULL (Cape Myrtle Festival Benefit) at Cats Cradle. 967-9053.
IODINE AND BOURBON at Local 506. 942-5506.
MUMBLEFISH WITH VICKY PRATT KEATING at Crescent City Music Hall & Cafe. 932-3820.

FRIDAY, JULY 28

JUNIOR BROWN WITH LARRY HUTCHERSON at Cats Cradle. 967-9053.
ED HALL WITH DANIEL CARTIER at Crescent City Music Hall & Cafe. 932-3820.
TINSEL WITH MOL TRIFFED AND GIGANTIC at Local 506. 942-5506.

SATURDAY, JULY 29

AWARENESS ART ENSEMBLE at Cats Cradle. 967-9053.
EVIL WEINER WITH SPECIAL GUEST at Local 506. 942-5506.
ACCIDENTALS at Crescent City Music Hall & Cafe. 932-3820.

SUNDAY, JULY 30

KID SISTER at Cats Cradle. 967-9053.
THEY CALL IT GLUE WITH JAM BO EYE AND MARBLE at Local 506. 942-5506.
MONDAY, JULY 31
IN THE JOINT at Crescent City Music Hall & Cafe. 932-3820.

Movie Night at Local 506. 942-5506.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 1

LOVE NUT AND WISH FOR FISH at Local 506. 942-5506.
LAPANDOWIES at Crescent City Music Hall & Cafe. 932-3820.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2

VERSUS WITH ASHLEY STOVE at Cats Cradle. 967-9053.

SPECIAL EVENTS

EARTH, WIND AND FIRE at Walnut Creek Amphitheatre, Friday, July 28. For more information call 919-731-6400.
ALLMAN BROTHERS WITH DAG AND CHRIS ANDERSON at Walnut Creek Amphitheatre, Saturday, July 29. For more information call 919-731-6400.
STEVE MILLER BAND WITH DOOBIE BROTHERS at Walnut Creek Amphitheatre, Wednesday, August 2. For more information call 919-731-6400.
KING ARTHUR RULES at the Forest Theatre, beginning August 3. Call 932-9793.
CALIGULA at the Forest Theatre, beginning August 10. Call 932-9793.
DREADFUL at the Forest Theatre, beginning August 17. Call 932-9793.

To make an announcement contact Dean Hair or Daniel Kois at 962-0245.

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