

'Shallow' Contradicts Message for Cheap Laughs

By JAMES RUSS
Staff Writer

Isn't it hilarious to see average people in relationships with morbidly obese people?

No one ever says that (out loud at least), but it seems to be the driving force behind the Farrelly brothers new comedy "Shallow Hal."

Jack Black plays the title character, who is obsessed with pursuing supermodel women who have no inner beauty. Enter Anthony Robbins - motivational guru. Robbins gets trapped in an elevator with Hal and hypnotizes him to see the inner beauty in women no matter how unattractive their exteriors. Before he knows it, Hal is falling for every overweight and deformed woman he sees (but wouldn't you know it, no physically attractive women are beautiful on the inside - aw shucks).

Hal ultimately falls hard for the 300-pound Rosemary, who looks like the glamorous goddess Gwyneth Paltrow to Hal. The rest of the movie is spent with Mauricio (Jason Alexander) trying to talk Hal out of his newfound love for hefty Rosemary. This sets up the film's cheesy dilemma for "Hal" - Should you be in a

relationship for love or appearance?

Movies with a moral agenda are usually hard to pull off (a la "Pay it Forward"), and "Shallow Hal" is no exception. The problem stems mainly from the way Hal's love interest is portrayed.

Rosemary is not developed beyond being nice and well, overweight, and the film doesn't really explain the fact that had Rosemary not looked like Gwyneth Paltrow to Hal, he never would have fallen for her. This love for the appearance (real or perceived) defeats the film's message.

Paltrow is rarely actually in the fat suit playing Rosemary. Her weight is alluded to in broken chairs and trampoline-sized underwear, but the audience seldom has to confront itself with the idea of Rosemary being overweight. The Farrelly brothers had a real opportunity to confront the audience's idea of beauty and "Shallow Hal," but they opt out of the challenge and instead just show the skinny Rosemary most of the time. Maybe the failings of its message could be excused if the comedy was spot on, but unfortunately it's flawed as well.

Instead of playing the typical funny guy, Black is forced into the cringe-inducing nice guy role for most of the movie. Save for the one scene where Hal shows off his dance moves, Black



Gwyneth Paltrow and Jack Black star in "Shallow Hal," the latest Farrelly Brothers film, which pokes fun at fat people instead of "hair gel."

never gets a chance to showcase his comedic chops. Jason Alexander is also stuck in another lame post-Seinfeld role where he is relegated to uninspired musing about fecal matter and the size of his penis.

The film's directing duo, the Farrelly brothers, seem like they are trying to stretch themselves beyond their usual dick and fart jokes common in their previous movies like "Dumb & Dumber" and "There's Something About Mary." The "beauty is only skin deep" moral of

"Shallow Hal" seems to be a deliberate attempt to transcend the Farrelly's earlier films, but it's really just a cheap vehicle for all of the usual toilet humor plus fat jokes.

Which is why "Shallow Hal" ultimately loses its bite in trying to make it digestible to the masses. It's hard to learn to accept people when you can't stop making fun of them.

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Malkmus' Clever Sarcasm, Charm Enthrall Audience

By BRIAN MILLIKIN
Staff Writer

It's hard to take Stephen Malkmus too seriously. Heroin-thin and with hair in his eyes, the ex-Pavement frontman was the star of the show Sunday, but he never acted the part.

Indie rock icon Malkmus was comfortable and comedic on the Cat's Cradle stage. His signature speak-singing delivery and his Philly falsetto were in fine form, and he screamed his slacker yelp whenever he could fit it.

Even though most people in the packed crowd were calling out Pavement song titles, it was hard to be disappointed with Malkmus' solo material. His new songs were already strong, but in the show he twisted his lyrical delivery playfully, tossing the words from his throat in casual carelessness.

Malkmus and his accomplished backing trio, the Jicks, balance their different styles well. "Jennifer and the Ess-Dog" and "Phantasies" were bouncy and bright, while "Trojan Curfew" and "Church on White" were dreamy and languid midtempo numbers - as slow as Malkmus goes.

Scattered hand-claps, tambourines and keyboards that his Jicks hang on the music never detract from Malkmus' secret aspiration: guitar hero - more

like Eddie Van Halen than Sebadoh. His finger-picking guitar skill is well known, but his indulgent solos have outgrown their humorous placement in his songs; now they're one of the main attractions.

Throughout the show, you always get the feeling that he's just another fan. Under any other circumstances, he'd be in the audience, too. He's just contractually obligated to be on stage and sing.

A professed old-school R.E.M. fan, his encore included an honorary cover of the Athens legends' "Radio Free Europe," and it drew the loudest applause. But the show's most memorable moment was an overblown version of Oasis' hit song "Champagne Supernova." He made up most of the lyrics yet somehow managed to seem as sincere as he was sarcastic.

In a humorous bout of pseudo-Townshend rocking, Malkmus furiously unstrapped his guitar at the end of a song, grabbed it by the neck and smashed it to the floor.

But the blow never connected. That would've been too serious.

That's the party line on Malkmus - it's never clear where the joke stops or who besides him is in on it. His slacker songs are clever and catchy, but if you're looking for life lessons, look elsewhere. All what's really obvious with him is that he's having infectious fun, playing not just his instrument but the crowd as well.

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Quick Dialogue, Brilliant Cast Pull Off Mamet's 'Heist'

By ZACK HEMENWAY
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In the big-money world of feature films, substance often takes a back seat to style. Flashy stunts and special effects reign, and dialogue is reduced to a series of wannabe catchphrases. But somebody forget to tell this to David Mamet, writer-director of "Heist."

"Heist" is the story of Joe Moore (Gene Hackman), a savvy veteran thief who's always planning one step ahead - think Paul Newman in "The Sting." Joe is looking to leave the larceny game for good, but a local crime lord forces him to do one last job before he goes.

Sound like you've already seen this movie? Perhaps, but Mamet's razor-sharp dialogue keeps this story fresh.

His characters are never at a loss for words. When Joe is talking to a police officer, one of his partners tells an accomplice not to worry, because "my man's so cool, when he sleeps, sheep count him."

In addition to memorable one-liners, the script features a rapid-fire style of banter between characters which holds the audience's attention well. Drawing from his theater background, where he had his actors rehearse with a metronome, Mamet makes the exchanges rhythmic and well-timed.

Led by Hackman, the strong cast carries the film. He is perfect in the role of an aging criminal trying to get out and prove he's not too old for the job at the same time. When he says lines like, "I don't clear my throat without a backup plan," it is impossible not to root for him.

Supporting players Delroy Lindo and Danny DeVito are solid as always, and Sam Rockwell gives a breakout perfor-

mance as Silk, the crime lord's nephew, despite being forced to grow a horrendous Billy Dee Williams mustache for the role.

Of course lines and actors can't do all the work. The generic story fails to hold up its end at times and the abrupt, anticlimactic ending is somewhat disappointing.

But the script and acting more than

make up for these imperfections. Viewers who are tired of 10-minute car chases and ridiculous special effects should let Mamet stage a "Heist" of these modern cinematic standbys.

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movie review

"The Heist"
★★★★☆

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