

'Dickie' dumb on different levels

BY NICK PARKER
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

"Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star" is pure deconstructive genius.

By eliminating every shred of intelligence, stripping away every element of a good film, Paramount makes a flick so dumb it's funny. The writing is elementary, trite and contrived — despite how shallow the actual content is. The acting is so bad it makes you wonder if director Sam Weisman pushed for crap on purpose. The plot is such a silly shot-in-the-dark it's dismissable — if you take any time to think about it your teeth will try to eat your brain. The emotion is so stretched and uncomfortable it's laughable by itself.

And it all works. At least on some level. It's free of pretensions, it's immature and it's harmless. By setting the bar low, Weisman — responsible for other stupid distractions like "The Out-of-Towners" and "George of the Jungle" — achieves his goal. If you plan for a hurricane and all you get is rain, you're doing pretty well.

Just don't expect a bright, sunny day.

The basic premise of the film is about as ambitious as its director, Dickie Roberts (David Spade), a sickly-sweet blond booger gains fame in a sitcom television show by smiling a lot and spouting off his adorable catchphrase — "this is nucking futs."

Thirty years later Dickie finds himself stuck in the Celebrity Boxing ring with the 4'3", 92 pound powerhouse Emanuel Lewis and no reason to live. "Webster," apparently, entered his own downward spiral after getting booted from the Hollywood heights.

Ushered in by a band of 300 plus pound gansters and M.O.P.'s "Ante Up," Lewis must have taken a much darker path.

Sound stupid? That's the whole gimmick.

Unfortunately, "Dickie" could have garnered a lot more laughs if Spade was still on top of his game.

When Chris Farrelly was still kicking he and Spade formed a dynamic, sharp combo. Slap-stick physical stunts for the fat man; wry, dry wit for the weaselly wuss.

Now, Spade tries to fill the gap

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★★★

by steering a bike into a parked car and screeching across a dry Slip and Slide. No blubber, no fun.

And his sacrasim has lost its bite too, without a big, dumb animal to bounce it off of. But Spade does spew a few stingng one-liners to save face.

But, the real humor in "Dickie Roberts" is the running joke it plays on former child stars — that they basically aren't real people.

Screech (Dustin Diamond), Greg Brady (Barry Williams), Danny Patridge (Danny Bonaduce) and Corey Feldman form part of Spade's poker crew and spend the entire time in self-pity and jealous resentment.

Crown that with a marathon of child stars in a "We Are The World"-style ballad of self-degradation, threats of violence and lewd language (Marsha Brady drops the f-bomb) and its clear they are just perpetuating the joke.

With that in mind, this film works — on a very base level. But you just have to take it for what it is, a silly joke from Hollywood aimed at itself. If you try and make it into something more, your nucking futs.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

BY PHILIP MCFEE
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Remember 2002? The year David Spade wasn't in any movies? Yeah, that was great.

Well, Hollywood's resident miniscule blond wisecracker returns in "Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star."

Dickie Roberts is an "I Love the 70s"-caliber, washed-up child star. Spade, as Roberts, is especially believable in the role, portraying an out-of-work actor reeling from poor career decisions.

No need to ask why. Following career advice from his similarly-fortuned agent, played by Jon Lovitz, Dickie decides to relive his childhood to increase his depth as an actor.

Essentially, the premise makes it possible for David Spade to interact with people his own height.

The biggest insight in the whole film comes from the mother of the former family Dickie falls in with. Heather Bolan (a rapidly earnest Ashley Edner) states:

"You realize that this is, without a doubt, the most ridiculous endeavor anyone has ever attempted."

No arguments here. Even the Bolan children slip into a catatonic delivery when carrying through their contrived scenes with Spade.

It's difficult to target the film's downfall, which can be collectively accredited to the writers, direc-

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★

tor and cast. The movie has writers. Two of them, in fact. One is David Spade. The other contributor, Fred Wolf, wrote "Joe Dirt."

The dialogue is laughable — truly wretched stuff. "You're my answer, Dickie. You're the thing that's going to make me happy."

Hey, it's not that kind of movie. Although at one point a hormonally-charged middle schooler launches into a Pete Townshend-quality dance routine that will turn heads — away from the screen.

Taste isn't big for Dickie, this is a movie that has something for everyone, if offense is the aim. Homosexuals, blacks, women and rabbits — the Dickie hit list keeps on rolling.

Spade's character utters the catchphrase of his youthful years enough — "This is nucking futs!" — to build up a genuine level of Dickie-resentment in the viewer.

It's generally a bad sign when viewers feel a cathartic release after a sympathetic main character gets hurt. Slapstick is Spade's schtick, and he's staying with it.

It is nice to see Dickie pummeled by Emmanuel Lewis on celebrity boxing.

The entire setup is a well-constructed farce, nucking futs to the last.

When Dickie recalls his childhood — "we were laughing, and I was really happy" — moviegoers are reminded of their experience in the lobby before entering the theater.

But, to leave the theater early would be a shame. The end credits feature a musical number by a collective of child stars.

Once again, "I Love the 70s" — with singing. To prefer the washed up Re-run over the grizzled gollocks playing lead is a sad thought, but, ultimately, a reality.

So, once more, viewers — remember 2002. A good vintage. David Spade is back. Just shoot me.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.



David Spade plays a childhood TV star gone wrong (don't they all), who tries to buy back his childhood in "Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star."

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CYCLES

FROM PAGE 5
"Recent" films have been extremely gory and bloody," said Aris Christofides, editor of Critics, Inc. Web sites — comprised of three sites, including Kids-In-Mind.com, the most popular independent source for movie ratings.

"For a short while everyone (was) showing sensitivity," Christofides said. But, in 2003 it's "back to business as usual. People still watch gory movies ... by our standards, they are more violent than they used to be."

Kids-in-Mind rates movies on sex/nudity, violence/ gore and profanity and receives 30 million plus hits a month. It gave the recent "Jeepers Creepers 2" a nine-out-of-10 in the latter two categories.

"Jeepers Creepers 2" is but a single example in a recent rash of R-rated top-grossers. In 2002, one of the top-20 moneymaking films was rated R.

In 2003, there are three R-offenders in the top 10.

Christofides expressed concern that the Motion Picture Association of America, the lobbying arm of Hollywood, was becoming more lenient in its ratings.

Ratings influence audiences. "They're like brand names. They have connotations," he said.

The brands are the same as when sensitivity was in vogue — but now, the price is higher.

In an early post Sept. 11 era, violence and action in the media was considered insensitive, but now the faux pas has been lifted.

This summer's box office was dominated by action blockbusters, and television is no different.

In the fall of 2002 on CBS, the two "CSI: Crime Scene Investigators" series accounted for two hours a week. This year, "CSI" shows run five hours a week — in primetime.

The forensics-based show was created by Jerry Bruckheimer, whose R-rated "Bad Boys II" is ninth for total gross this year.

The series that epitomizes the American television now is the FX Network's graphic plastic surgery drama "Nip/Tuck."

"We make no bones about it," said John Solberg, senior vice-president of public relations for FX Networks. "What we're doing is looking for adults who're trying to reach programming that's a little more challenging."

FX doesn't sugarcoat ads, either. TV spots for "Nip/Tuck" clearly reference the show's TV-MA rating and give glimpses of its extreme content. Despite the sometimes shocking promos, Nip/Tuck still prospers. "It's arguably one of the most critically acclaimed new series," Solberg said. "It's the highest rated series to premiere on basic cable in 2003."

Competing with 63 other ad-supported networks and graphic content, FX gets what it wants — America is tuning in. As a general trend, the 2003 debuts gravitate toward violence, but last year witnessed an influx of family comedies. Last September,

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"It's a moot point — whether there's any envelope to push."

KEN WLASCHIN, CREATIVE AFFAIRS
DIRECTOR FOR THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE

ABC premiered "8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter" and "Life with Bonnie."

This fall, the network will experiment with new action shows "Threat Matrix" and "Karen Sisco." The shocking face-value of "Nip/Tuck" is a far cry from the wholesome "American Dreams," which hit the airwaves last year.

The limits of decency are no longer sacred — the American public once more demands extreme content and gritty reality. In a way that's now becoming typical, "Nip/Tuck" is remaking the American Dream, one cut at a time.

Ken Wlaschin, director of creative affairs for the American Film Institute, said America's lust for reality programming in film and television is expanding.

"A lot of people go to the movies to escape reality," Wlaschin said, speaking of movies' power in America and their direction. "I don't know how much more they can do. It's a moot point — whether there's any envelope to push."

After a lull, caused by a "loss of innocence" or not, expansion of standards will inevitably occur. Such is the case for the music industry, which pushes for diversity in lieu of film and TV's violence.

Geoff Mayfield, director of charts and senior analyst for Billboard Magazine, likened the current music scene to the confusion of the fall of disco in the early '80s. He noted that declining sales and an unclear direction don't necessarily mean stifled creativity.

"A lot of what happens in music is cyclical," said Mayfield. The music scene, in the throes of the post-9-11 economic slump, still created a diverse blend of sounds. "It wasn't all about flag-waving ... it wasn't all about right and wrong. There was a broad palette that came from that event," Mayfield said.

As the Polyphonic Spree advertise an electronic-choral experience, 50 Cent continues to take his bold-faced lyricism to the American public.

Opinions sway, but sonic expansion is unimpeded.

Looking into the future, two years after Sept. 11, it's safe to say innocence has been lost, but, gazing forward, nothing is fully realized.

Anti-war media sentiment has yet to reach a level akin to that at the end of the Beatles' generation.

Anthony Swofford's Gulf War memoir "Jarhead" and the unflinchingly violent, subversively anti-military film "Buffalo Soldiers" may be a glimpse of what lies in store for American media.

But the media won't be channeled in an intentional direction. Christofides put it best, when speaking on the state of movies. ("The) MPA should simply lobby and let the marketplace work."

Mayfield echoed that sentiment, when looking at music's direction: "The music industry will get back on course."

That's the best part of the American arts scene. Quick peeks of the future pass by, but the final course is always a surprise.

The rebuilding has begun. The industry is back on track — the final destination is unknown.

The Beatles know what to do. Let it be.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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