



COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

Two-thirds of the jazzy geriatric trio in 'The Triplets of Belleville' croon their old-fashioned swinging tunes amidst an animated ensemble cast.

Fantasy rules in surreal 'Triplets'

French film offers colorful diversion

BY PHILIP MCFEE

ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Belleville is a strange place. Imagine Prohibition Chicago seen through the eyes of Roald Dahl — a city of smoke, spires and jazz singers.

"The Triplets of Belleville," a 2003-released French animated film, takes viewers on a quirky journey from the pastoral outskirts of Paris to the swinging stateside city of Belleville.

Taking up the reins from last year's spectacular "Spirited Away," the film is a Western effort at colorful, surrealist animation that, although tangential, is a rewarding journey.

The tale follows the exploits of Madame Souza, a diminutive grandma with uneven legs who, with her dog Bruno, tries to rescue her kidnapped son.

A bizarre adventure through and through, the kidnapper's trail leads the duo from the Tour de France to the American headquarters of the wine-sipping Franco-mafia.

In the newsreel-quality intro, towering women haul their dates into a Vaudevilian theatre to hear the famous singing triplets. During a subsequent performance by a topless tribal dancer, the men turn into monkeys and swarm the stage.

The tone is set. It's going to be that kind of film.

As fantastical as director Sylvain Chomet's vision seems, it's not a substance-free flick for children.

Early in the film, the French countryside is overrun with construction as the web of industrialization spreads to the Souza's village. Later, the ocean fog lifts to reveal America, dominated by tall ships and choked by busy streets. Crowds can chuckle at the antics

MOVIE REVIEW

"THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE"

★★★★★

of the ever-present square-shouldered gangsters who have an awkward Inspector Clouseau meets "Rocky & Bullwinkle" villainy. But, when a mafioso suddenly executes one of the captured bikers, the dark turn comes as a shock.

Surprises are no stranger to "The Triplets of Belleville." The short film is delightful mess: a manic pastiche of geriatrics, grenades, frogs (the amphibians, not the filmmakers) and Betty Boop-inspired musical numbers.

To complement the mad-cap images, the film contains no direct dialogue. All scenes are played out entirely in the visual realm.

Bring an open mind. The French are in vogue now, with the success of "Amelie" and Air's new album garnering critical acclaim. Although "The Triplets of Belleville" won't defeat "Finding Nemo" in the Oscar race, it's a rewarding investment.

French cinema, for nationalism's sake, is freedom film. And, homeland security or not, the odd "Triplets" is as liberating as they come.

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

'Dates' more Sandler schlock

BY KATIE SCHWING

STAFF WRITER

Drew Barrymore joins up with Adam Sandler again for this Hawaiian sweetheart comedy, but "50 First Dates" is not "The Wedding Singer 2."

The plot of the film concerns Henry Roth, a local guy who is just Adam Sandler acting like Adam Sandler, and Lucy Whitmore, a pretty blond ditz played by Barrymore.

The gimmick is that Lucy was injured in a car accident and has only a day's worth of short-term memory.

Each morning she wakes up thinking it's the same morning, like "Groundhog Day" in Hawaii.

Roth, an aquarium assistant, spends his time on one-night stands with tourists and is obviously afraid of commitment.

A perfect match, right? But one wrench — or pineapple — gets thrown in the machine. He falls for her and for most of the movie tries to come up with new slapstick ways to catch her interest.

Helping Roth in his antics is Sandler flick staple Rob Schneider, who pulls off the part of Roth's unhappily-settled Hawaiian friend Ula.

His pidgin English, while less than accurate, is more riveting than Sandler's meeker-than-usual character, and he steals more than a few scenes.

The loveable Sean Astin ("The Goonies") plays Lucy's brother, a juiced-up wannabe body builder. While his character doesn't go beyond this stereotype, his endearing lisp and brotherly love make him a likeable goof.

Even Allen Covert makes a requisite cameo as 10 Second Tom, a fellow memory patient who shares the screen for about that length of time.

The first half of "50 First Dates" focuses on the crude humor associated with Sandler movies of yore (more "schlong" jokes than you shake a stick at) and pokes fun at local Hawaiian culture.

But seriously, how many Spam jokes can one movie take?

Oddly, the most endearing parts of the film come from the cheesy "This is Your Life" scenes with Henry and Lucy.



COURTESY OF COLUMBIA PICTURES

Adam Sandler stars as a persistent, albeit idiotic, romantic opposite the forgetful Drew Barrymore in the throwaway love flick "50 First Dates."

Though it seems Barrymore and Sandler's equally flaky characters were made for each other, the chemistry comes not in the form of steamy romance but in Roth's willingness to commit to a woman who would never recognize him when she woke up in the morning.

While much of this time is centered around The Beach Boys' classic "Wouldn't It Be Nice," the cheese is a nice break from the same old repetitive low-brow Sandler shtick.

The happy ending and the great scenery can't save this movie from the bland canned jokes that should

MOVIE REVIEW

"50 FIRST DATES"

★★

have been laid to rest with "Billy Madison" and "Happy Gilmore."

It's nice to see Sandler trying to hint at more sentimental and serious situations, but the effort is too little, too late.

Save your money, and rent "Punch Drunk Love" and "The Endless Summer" instead. That will be more worth your time.

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

DIVERECOMMENDS

"Top Secret" This is Val Kilmer for people who hate Val Kilmer. In this '80s super-spoof he plays Nick Rivers, an American pop star who serves as an ambassador to Cold War-era East Germany. Somehow getting wrapped up in the less-than-apt and thoroughly hilarious French Resistance, he manages to save the day, get the girl and sing "Skeet Surfin," the most hilarious Beach Boys cover ever.

The Kids in the Hall The sketch comedy show where five guys end up playing women more than men is Canadian humor at its finest: weird, a little risque and surprisingly intelligent.

A Comedy Central staple, this show often gets lost in the books of great sketch comedy, and deserves more respect, especially when you consider the state of late night TV today. You can bet on your geeky 20-something cousin owning every DVD they've released.

Neutral Milk Hotel, In the Aeroplane Over the Sea One of the most beautiful albums ever written doesn't sound like it on the first spin. Jeff Mangum, on acoustic guitar, wails about abstract existences and ugly scenarios while a really fuzzed out bass and even a singing saw accompany.

The more you listen, the more a very poignant and breathtaking story comes through. To know that beauty in life and love exist despite all the ugliness that goes on in the world, through wars that don't make sense and families that are ripped apart, is more relevant than ever today.

Contact Katie Schwing at kschwing@email.unc.edu.

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