'The Bachelor' is cute, but don't stand in line for him

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

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Mom and I both agreed "The Bachelor" was cute and funny, but not worth waiting for.

Starring Chris O'Donnell as Jimmie, the reluctant groom, and Renee Zellweger as Anne, his dearly beloved, "The Bachelor" is like a long wedding service. It starts out slow and goes from a yawn to a yeah!

Jimmie's a wild mustang who doesn't want to give up his freedom. He and Anne have been dating for three years; he loves her, but not enough to get hitched.

His only surviving relative, grandfather (Peter Ustinov) is anxious for Jimmie to get married and start having children. Jimmie tries to get engaged, he takes Anne to the Starlight Room, the most romantic restaurant in town, and pops the question. "We've reached the place," he tells her. "The upshot is you win."

Disgusted, Anne asks, "Was that a proposal?" and leaves him. Jimmy tries to win her back, fails, but becomes desperate when his grandfather suddenly dies. Grandfather's will includes an ultimatum – get married by your 30th birthday to someone you'll stay married to for 10 years, and have children with her by your fifth year of marriage – or lose your $100 million inheritance.

In a panic, Jimmy who has only 24 hours before his birthday, begins looking for a bride.

At stake is the family business and the lives of the over 200 employees who will be out of work if Jimmy doesn't find a bride. If Jimmy doesn't succeed, family attorney Gluckman (Ed Asner) says he'll have to put the company up for sale in accordance with the will.

Rejected by Anne, Jimmie, with help from his best friend Marko (Arnie Lange) rents a limo, finds a priest, James Cromwell, and starts looking up old girlfriends including Buckley (Brooke Shields), Jennifer Riopelle, and Ilana (Mariah Carey), an opera singer.

Hal Holbrook stars as O'Dell, grandfather's stock broker who, while not a fan himself of marriage, encourages Jimmie.

"The Bachelor" is funny, even a little romantic, but like mom says, "it's all one big chase." There's not much of a story, and very little character development.

Jimmie chases Anne, and reluctantly tries to reconcile with old girlfriends who don't want him back, even for $100 million.

If you're a fan of "Suddenly Susan," you'll probably chuckle at Brooke Shields characterization of Buckley. She's a former debutante in need of cash. Buckley's been waiting for this moment, and even has a wedding dress she quickly changes into. While smoking cigarette after cigarette and uttering "$100 million," Buckley learns the terms of grandfather's will.

It's supposed to be funny, but mom and I weren't laughing.

The best part comes at the end when Marko puts a classified ad in the paper in a last minute attempt to find a bride for Jimmie who has exhausted all possibilities.

Imagine over 1,000 brides in all shapes and sizes converging on the church to meet a groom with $100 million to offer. It's a chase that makes this mediocre movie memorable.

"The Bachelor" written by Steve Cohen is an update of the 1925 Buster Keaton film "Seven Chances," the story of a confirmed bachelor who has 24 hours to find a bride and get married to collect a $100 million inheritance.

Gary Sinyor ("Stiff Upper Lips," "Leon The Pig Farmer" and "Solitaire for Two") directs "The Bachelor," a New Line Cinema release. O'Donnell is the executive producer; Lloyd Segan, Bing Howenstein, Leon Dudevoir and Steve Hollocker are co-producers.

"The Bachelor" is rated PG-13 and opens Friday at metro Detroit movie theaters. To let us know what you thought of "The Bachelor," or any newly released movie, e-mail your comments to kwygoni@oe.homecomm.net or fax to Wygonik (734) 591-7279.

Also scheduled to open this Friday is:

■ **"Being John Malkovich"** — Comedy about a puppeteer who finds a door in his office that allows him to enter the mind of John Malkovich and become the famous actor. Stars John Cusack, Cameron Diaz.

■ **"The Bone Collector"** — drama about a corpse found next to railroad tracks in Spanish Harlem, which forces a street-smart policeman to ream up with a brilliant, but bed-bound forensics expert in order to solve the murder. Stars Denzel Washington.

■ **"The Insider"** — Drama about a one-time corporate officer who becomes a key witness in lung cancer cases against tobacco companies. He tells his story to an investigative reporter who tries to get the piece aired, even though his network refuses. Stars Al Pacino.

■ **"Boys Don't Cry"** — Drama based on the life and times of Teen Marie Brandon, a 21-year-old who passed herself off as a boy before acquaintances turned on her in a violent attack. One week later, the same pair shot her and two others to death. Stars Hilary Swank.

MARK FELLMAN/NEW LINE CINEMA

Romantic comedy: *Renee Zellweger and Chris O'Donnell star in "The Bachelor."*

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Comics, filmmakers experts at how to 'wing it'

BACKSTAGE PASS

ANN DELISI

Sooner or later, we all have to "wing it." Whether it's a work-related project neglected until the last minute or an awkward social situation that could turn messy, most of us rise to the occasion when we need a spontaneous solution. That doesn't mean we like it.

There is a weird sub-culture of people within the performing arts who thrive on such situations. Instead of lurking in the shadows, those that improvise seem to be everywhere ... and they're getting big laughs.

The most visible example of the "improv" craze is the hit ABC series "Whose Line is It Anyway?" It is impossible to watch without wondering how the talented cast develops such witty routines and song lyrics without a script to follow.

As anyone who has ever tried a spontaneous parody of a popular song by changing the lyrics knows, sometimes it works – and sometimes it doesn't.

Lex Kuhne hosts a Backstage Pass segment on the growing movement of improv comics, which airs at 5:30 p.m. Thursday and midnight Friday on WTVS Channel 56. To lend perspective to the segment, he tried his hand at a Tuesday improv night at Second City.

"It's fun. It's interactive. What amazed me is how you get caught up in the spontaneity of the routine. You really don't have any choice but to trust your instincts and say the first thing that comes to mind. If it's not funny, your hope is that you've at least given another cast member something to work with," he says.

Just when I was starting to think that the "without a net" aspect of improvisational comedy may not be so daunting, there's "Improv 'til Dawn." After this Saturday's late show at Second City on Woodward in Detroit, some of our finest comedy troupes will perform in an improvisational marathon that doesn't even start until 1 a.m. What kind of twisted individual wants to perform without a script when they're sleep deprived?

Kuhne suggests that if anyone can create the funny stuff at 4 a.m. an improv specialist can.

"Improvisation has long been an unknown and underrated form of comedy. What we're seeing in Detroit is the development of some talented comics who are using their Second City experience to increase the visibility of improv," says Kuhne, who has no intention of giving up his day job.

Speaking of improvisation, have you ever been handed the video camera at a party or family function? You're told to capture the magic moments but seldom receive any more instruction than "just push the red button." The results are usually less than stellar.

Filmmakers

An annual event called "Super 8 Saturday" issues a similar challenge to young filmmakers. Entrants are given one roll of film, one camera and one afternoon to complete their project.

"Different participants come with different levels of preparation," said Chris McElroy, who organizes the event for the Detroit Filmmakers Coalition. It's a nice way of saying that if you're not organized, your film may be dreadful.

"Many are extremely prepared with a shot list, timings for each scene, and a story they wish to tell, but the ability to improvise when you're on the shoot can also help your film," said McElroy.

Two of the best efforts from this year's event will be shown on this week's edition of Backstage Pass.

I guess if there's a lesson to be learned from the odd pairing of "Improv 'til Dawn" and "Super 8 Saturday," it's that it's fine to "wing it" as long as you're prepared. Life does get complicated, doesn't it?

COMMUNITY THEATER

'Brigadoon' offers worthwhile family entertainment

First Theater Guild presents "Brigadoon" 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Nov. 5-6, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 7, in Knox Auditorium of the First Presbyterian Church , 1669 W. Maple, Birmingham. Tickets $8, adults; $5, students and seniors. For information and/or reservations, call (248) 644-2087, ext. 151.

BY SANDRA DALKA-PETSHY
SPECIAL WRITER

What do a Novi software engineer, a Clintondale middle school teacher, a cardiovascular medical technician at Beaumont Hospital, a senior mortgage loan officer, and two wee brothers have in common?

They all have talent, wear plaid clothes and are inhabitants of the fictional Scottish village of "Brigadoon," the current production of the First Theater Guild of Birmingham.

The software engineer is Kevin Lee Branshaw, who plays the lead of Tommy Albright. He gets lost in the Scottish Highlands, discovers a mystical village in the mist that comes to life one day every 100 years and falls in love with a beautiful maiden, Fiona MacLaren (Kris Northcote). In the process, he discovers that "people have to lose things to find out what they really mean."

With a strong and clear voice, Branshaw reminds the audience of what an uplifting song "Almost Like Being in Love" really is.

Another notable in this enjoyable musical production is Jules DeWard, who in real life is a school teacher. During the funeral scene, this gifted dancer gives a moving performance as Maggie Anderson.

The Beaumont employee, Bill Dixon, plays a believable Brigadoon father to his real-life son, Billy Dixon, a 10th grader at Madison Heights' Lamphere High School. Billy plays an equally believable scorned lover whose attempt to flee Brigadoon ends in tragedy.

The loan officer, Clark Fry, plays Mr. Lundie, the wise and respected leader of this enchanting village. He delivers his tale and message well and reinforces that "with love anything can happen."

The smallest members of the cast of 30, brothers Christopher and David Hall, represent the family commitment given to this production.

(A number of families are involved in various ways in the musical's success.) They join their mother, Alice Fay Hall, who, as choreographer, turns the cast into accomplished movers and dancers. Their older brother, Patrick Hall, also serves on the stage crew.

"Brigadoon" offers worthwhile family entertainment. The scenery is simple yet effective. There are Scottish-inspired costumes (lots and lots of plaid), and, most of all, the beautiful music of Frits Loewe and touching lyrics of Alan J. Lerner.