

Comedy has dramatic overtones **Radio** from page A1

By DAVID GERMAIN
AP MOVIE WRITER

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Sidewalks of New York" has all the trappings of a Woody Allen film — a Manhattan setting, an ensemble cast blundering through the entanglements of passion, the little conceit of characters speaking in pseudo-interviews about their love lives.

Only writer, director and co-star Edward Burns is no Woody Allen. Minus the fraternal framework that underpinned his clever "The Brothers McMullen" and the lesser "She's the One," Burns is back on the familiar turf of romantic comedy with dramatic overtones. Unfortunately, the humor of "Sidewalks of New York" pales next to that of "Brothers McMullen" or even "She's the One." "Sidewalks" borders on our dear, presenting main characters lacking charm whose melodramatic ramblings and rantings hold little interest for viewers.

The principal cast delivers solid performances, notably Stanley Tucci, Rosario Dawson and Burns' ex-girlfriend Heather Graham. Tucci's character, though, is so contemptibly deceptive and unfeeling that he becomes an eyesore every time he's on screen, while Burns' whiny alter-ego is a plain old bore.

And Burns' script sets the cast adrift in such irritating self-absorption that a documentary

on the marital strife of Henry VIII would be refreshing by comparison.

The only sparks of life come from Dennis Farina and Nadia Dajani in small roles. Farina plays a crude, grotesquely sun-tanned lecher who offers Burns' character guidance on bedding women. He's the caricature of sexist caricatures, but Farina plays it with such earnestness he makes the guy seem authentic.

Dajani contributes a saucy turn as Hillary, a frustrated wife who finds sexual satisfaction in an affair with her gynecologist. ("It's heaven," she coos. "I mean, think about it. If there's one thing that guy knows about...")

The loose structure of "Sidewalks" superficially resembles the revolving-door trysts of Arthur Schnitzler's play "La Ronde," with Burns' romanced-up New Yorkers crossing paths and trading pillow partners.

There's Tommy (Burns), newly separated from his girlfriend (Callie Thorne). Tommy has a dalliance with Maria (Dawson) while making halfhearted passes at Annie (Graham). Annie's married to Griffin (Tucci), who carries on an affair with teen-ager Ashley (Brittany Murphy), who's also pursued by Ben (David Krumholtz), a doorman simultaneously trying to reunite with Maria, his ex-wife.

Michael Leydon Campbell plays dual roles as Ben's security East Village pal and as Hillary's husband, a poster boy for midlife

crises. Burns fails to craft an integrated whole out of these convoluted dynamics. There's little cohesion in the meanderings of the characters, who bump into each other by chance far too often, as though in Burns' world, Manhattan were about as populous as Mayberry.

Scenes drag on endlessly, overlaid with mundane bickering among characters. Burns succeeds in creating naturalistic dialogue: It's so natural, it's as though these most real-life conversations would be on screen.

The narrative clumsily interweaves responses from the cast to an unseen, unexplained interviewer, who seems to have outlandishly open-door access to the characters to query them in their sex lives.

The hand-held camera work and documentary style do lend intimacy to "Sidewalks." But who'd want to be intimate with these people, the movie's guests?

The film had been scheduled for release Sept. 21 but was delayed because of the terrorist attacks, the notion of romantic shenanigans on the streets of New York seeming non too savory after Sept. 11. The months later, the movie is no more welcome, though. "Sidewalks of New York," a Paramount Classics release, runs 108 minutes.

performances at Greenfield Village in Dayton. "I did a tremendous amount of work when I started. I searched all over for scripts. I started doing 'It's a Wonderful Life' three or four years ago. This one offers you year with Olympia Entertainment."

Olympia expanded the group's performances this year. If needed, they'll add a Dec. 22 show. "It's a Wonderful Life is such a perennial favorite. It's such a feel-good script. I do have other scripts. I have a pretty good script of 'Christmas Carol' but it's done other places. Meadow Brook (theater) does it every year," Bufalini said.

"Nobody does 'It's a Wonderful Life,' especially the way we do. People love it. It surprises me how much they love it. People are fascinated watching these different characters come out of the same throats and by seeing how the sound effects are done. And hopefully, watching the director will be fun."

Bufalini, who also has taught broadcast performance at Wayne State University, will cue actors and sound effects crew from behind a music stand on stage. He'll also play three characters in the play.

Sara Fournace of Beverly Hills, a morning show co-host at WKQI, has played the part of Mary Bailey for two years.

WKQI morning show voice man, Eric Harthen of Pleasant Ridge, also returns this year to portray George Bailey.

"I made an audition tape and tried every voice. I played it on the phone for Marty," Fournace said, recalling her informal audition last year.

"Every once and a while on the (WKQI) show, I get to do a character voice or parody or skit that Eric puts together for me. But mostly on the show we just try to be ourselves. This 'It's a Wonderful Life' gives me a chance to do what I've always wanted to do, which was act."

Fournace, a Birmingham Seaholm High School graduate, studied broadcast journalism and theater at Michigan State and completed the program at Specs Howard School of Broadcasting, before landing the job at Q 85.5.

"Radio acting is very different from theater acting. That's why I

try to get the same people every year," Bufalini said. "I tell my students in my classes at Wayne State to use your body, gesture, use your face. Don't just read. Those are just chemicals on a piece of wood pulp. It's your job to make it come alive."

Bufalini hopes he and other audio drama enthusiasts will get a chance to perform again in the future.

"I'd like to see it go further, maybe do a one-hour show somewhere once a month," he said.

Zizza said funding is a major challenge for serious audio professionals.

"You need funding, resources, and material. There are a lot of hobbyists out there. But if the product isn't good, it won't sell," she said.

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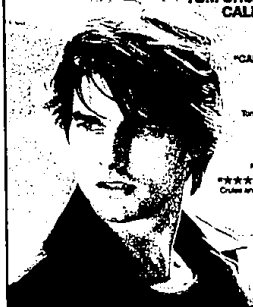
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