

Lizzie McGuire's a teenage girl's fantasy

THE LIZZIE MCGUIRE MOVIE
**1/2 (out of four)
Lizzie McGuire (Hilary Duff) is a giggly teenager with a knack for screwing up. At her junior high graduation, she trips and pulls down the curtain backdrop, knocking her entire class from the risers. Her little brother - a master blackmailer who possesses a folder entitled "The Lizzie Files," which includes subfolders like "Trips & Falls" and "Embarrassing Moments" - tapes the incident and sends it to CNN.

Desperate to duck prime-time humiliation, Lizzie joins her class trip to Rome, under the militaristic eye of their chaperone, Mrs. Ungermeyer.

Things take a turn for the totally dreamy when Lizzie meets Italian pop star Paolo, who wants Lizzie to impersonate his former girlfriend and singing partner, Isabella, at an awards show that takes place at - but of course! - the Roman Coliseum.

The song Lizzie sings at the end of the film - a moronic, embarrassingly catchy teenybopper number called *What Dreams Are Made Of* - is really the perfect comment on the preceding exercise in adolescent fantasy, because Lizzie McGuire is exactly that: a teenage girl's fantasy.

It's pretty clear that Lizzie McGuire isn't exactly re-drawing the map of modern-day gender roles, and this is what is most irritating and endearing about the film. Lizzie encounters no adventure. No international intrigue. Her only competition? Other girls, locked in savage competition to out-glam their bitter rivals.



Extra Butter
Daniel Kraus

Sure, Lizzie does her fair share of conniving, but it is solely in aid of nabbing the romantic attention of a boy she hardly knows. With Lizzie in an almost constant state of swoon, *Lizzie McGuire* is borderline offensive - what happened to all the faux-feminist "girl power" that was all the rage a couple years ago? Lizzie makes the Spice Girls look radical.

But let's be honest with ourselves here: 14-year-old girls do dress in pink outfits with the word "love" stenciled on them. They do obsess over clothes and make-up. Because if they don't succeed in getting that idiotic 14-year-old boy to look at them they might, like, totally die! If you've ever seen the kids' TV show that Lizzie McGuire is based on, you know that the opening credits look like a JC Penny's commercial: the clear message, in a nutshell, is to dress up, fit in, and be cute - and the world will be your oyster.

Despite all this, I liked *Lizzie McGuire* precisely because it contained no messages. It simply embraces modern middle-class WASP girlhood and treats all its neuroses and hang-ups as par for the course. The young ladies at my screening loved the film, feebly in part because it reassured them that their unimportant desires weren't unimportant at all. "It's OK to spend three hours

planning your wardrobe," the film assured them. And, for better or worse, there was an almost audible sigh of relief. Duff makes it all work. Like many child actors, her acting is slightly overconfident, but behind her bluster you can still see an overwhelmed youngster - and is this not how one braves the daily junior high gauntlet?

Unfortunately, Duff is way too pretty - never for a second did I believe Lizzie could ever be as unpopular as the film implies. After all, Duff is a Britney Spears look-alike, and lest we miss it, there are several Britney-style dance sequences to solidify the comparison.

Like Britney, Duff treads an uncomfortable middle ground of being aggressively sexy while still being very young (oddly, the film's reoccurring bits of animation portray Lizzie as an awkward beanpole, quite unlike the buxom starlet she really is). To neutralize this, Duff is put into a storyline so safe Pamela Anderson could emerge unscathed - there is never a threat of sex here, only of super-duper pop stardom.

To those of us who aren't adolescent females, *Lizzie McGuire* may seem to be part of the problem when it comes to issues of young women's confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. Still, Lizzie's contemporaries should feel welcome to embrace the movie. After all, don't they get enough preaching outside of the theater?

Daniel Kraus is a syndicated columnist and filmmaker. Info on his latest film, *Ball of Wax*, can be found at www.ballofwaxmovie.com.

FILM BEAT

Film Beat lists what's playing at alternative film theaters, special movie events and local flicks. Offerings and movie schedules may change after press time, so be sure to call ahead. Film beat listings and movie information can be submitted to: Nicole Stafford, Observer & Eccentric, Newspapers, 801 East Maple, Birmingham, Mich. 48009 or e-mail nstafford@oe.hometeam.com.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE. Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit, (313) 833-3227, www.dia.org/dia/. Adult admission, \$6.50, senior citizens, full-time students with valid identification and DIA members, \$5.50. Discount tickets available in book for live for \$25. Films screened Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. All Monday shows are in the evening.

REDFORD THEATRE. 17360 Lahser in Detroit, call (313) 537-2560. Regular admission, \$3.

BROW AND VIEW AT THE MAGIC BAG. 22920 Woodward, Ferndale, (248) 544-3030. www.magicbag.com. Movie nights on Wednesdays and Thursdays in small theater setting with full bar, must be at least 21, doors open at 8 p.m., films start at 9:30 p.m., box office hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$2.

MAIN ART THEATRE. 118 North Main at 11 Mile in downtown Royal Oak, (248) 542-0180. Adult evening admission is \$8.50. Matinees before 6 p.m. and admission for seniors and children is always \$6.

MAPLE ART THEATRE. 4135 West Maple in Bloomfield Township, (248) 542-0180. Adult evening admission is \$8.50.

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MICHIGAN THEATRE. 603 East Liberty, Ann Arbor, (734) 668-8463, www.michtheatre.com. Adult admission, \$8, students and senior citizens, \$6.25. Michigan Theater members, \$5.50. Films are shown daily.

STATE THEATRE. 233 State St., Ann Arbor, (734) 761-8667 or www.michtheatre.com. Adult admission, \$8, students and senior citizens, \$6.25.

UPTOWN BIRMINGHAM 8. 211 South Old Woodward Ave. in downtown Birmingham, (248) 644-3456. Adult admission is \$8.50 in the evening and \$6 for matinee showings before 6 p.m. Admission for seniors age 55 and older is \$5.50 at the time. Admission for children age 12 and under is \$5.75 at the time.

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Tina George, Westland;
Mildred Schwartz, Orion;

Lynn Halton, Farmington Hills;
Geraldine Giles, Detroit;
Anna Gavin, Livonia;
Rae Woodard, Canton;
Christine Ryski, Farmington Hills;
Sally Freed, Livonia.
The winners of our *Blast!* contest are: **Jacqueline Pasko,**

Rochester Hills;
Becky Holland, Farmington Hills;
Nancy Guregian, Livonia;
Christine Riker, Redford Township;
Annette Gray, Westland;
Laurel Hostetler, Oxford;
and Marge Roth, Beverly Hills.

Newspaper-in-Education Activity Column

"Focus on Getting Acquainted With Your Newspaper"

If you look through your local newspaper, you'll see many pictures and photographs. Generally, each photograph has a caption. Captions are the information below a photo describing it. They appear throughout the paper, giving the readers a better idea of what the photograph is about.

Captions are significant because they explain the photo and also give it meaning. The photos themselves are also important, because they attract the readers' interest to read the entire article. Captions vary in length, some being only one word (such as last names, locations, etc.) while others can be a few sentences long. However, despite the differences in length, each caption serves the same purpose - to give information about the photo to the reader.

Sketch three pictures with captions of your own. The pictures can be about school, sports, your friends, or even your family. The possibilities are endless - just be sure to write a caption for each picture you draw. Be creative with your pictures and your captions. You can add a little humor, by making them funny. Most importantly, have fun! After sketching three pictures and writing three captions, choose one of them to write a short article about and then present it to the class.

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions:

1. Why did you choose that particular picture and caption to write your article about?
2. Of the three, which picture and caption is your favorite?
3. Which picture and caption is the best in your class and why?

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