

Entertainment

Editor: Agnes Kruchio

Young Frankenstein has everything but humour

Brooks runs rampant, murders own jokes

By WARREN CLEMENTS

Where's Boris Karloff when you really need him?

Young Frankenstein, the current film from Mel (Blazing Saddles) Brooks, attempts to pay loving homage to the Universal studio horror films of the 1930s, with a blend of humour, thrills and plot twists.

It isn't thrilling. The plot only curls a bit. And worst of all, the film isn't funny.

DERANGED

Young Frankenstein follows Gene Wilder, as the great grandson of the original Dr. Frankenstein, through a lukewarm story in the course of which he creates the inevitable deranged monster (Peter Boyle) with the assistance of the inevitable Igor (Marty Feldman).

Along the way there is an embarrassingly tasteless dance-hall routine during which Wilder presents the monster to the town-folk. What starts out as an uproarious soft shoe parody winds up recalling those Montreal nightclub entrepreneurs who raked in the cash hiring mentally disturbed persons to "perform" before the police moved in for a series of arrests.

LONG WAY DOWN

But just as those Montreal shows played to packed houses, so the Brooks routine kept the audience I saw the film with rolling in the aisles. It's certainly a long way down from Madeline Kahn's hilarious Marlene Dietrich stage routine in Blazing Saddles.

The only scene that doesn't smack of weak puns and forced jokes is a brief parody of the meeting between the monster and the blind hermit

from The Bride of Frankenstein.

Anyone acquainted with Mel Brooks' penchant for sick humour might rightly assume that he would latch onto blindness like a shark onto a dying sailor's leg. Surprisingly, with Gene Hackman underplaying the cameo role of the hermit, the scene lets the hermit escape with dignity intact.

Mel Brooks displays an amazing knack for killing his own jokes, which admittedly are stillborn to begin with. Early on, as the train pulls into Transylvania, Wilder shouts to a boy on the platform, "Pardon me, boy. Is this the Transylvania Station?"

"JA, JA"

"Ja, ja. Track 29." Pause. "Oh, can I give you a shine?"

That's the joke, such as it is. Okay. Then the camera returns to Wilder, who looks stunned for 10 seconds.

"Uh, no thanks," says Wilder. Joke certified dead and buried. Brooks the director may be a master of comic timing, but you'd never know it from this film.

Later, when Wilder initially fails to revive the monster, he resolves to behave with "quiet dignity and grace"; he then launches into a minute of hysterics and is dragged off.

Fair enough. Some people like that sort of humour. But then Marty Feldman looks at the camera, sniffs the phrase "quiet dignity and grace", and rolls his eyes. That's as bad as having Brooks himself step in front of the camera and explain the joke.

SORRY WASTE

All this would merely amount to a



Marty Feldman (Igor), Cloris Leachman (the spooky caretaker), Gene Wilder (Dr. Frankenstein) and his assistant Teri Garr mull over the plot of Young Frankenstein. Such as it is.

bad movie if it weren't for the sorry waste of a superb cast, authentic locations and eerie photography, which captures the same black-and-white cobwebs, rain and lightning which rattled the audience's teeth in 1931.

The film evolved from an outline which Gene Wilder originally wrote in half an hour and filed away in his

drawer. He should have filed it under 'g', and given the crew and cast, including Madeline Kahn, Cloris Leachman and Marty Feldman, (a fantastic comedian in his own right), a chance to sink their teeth into another, better script.

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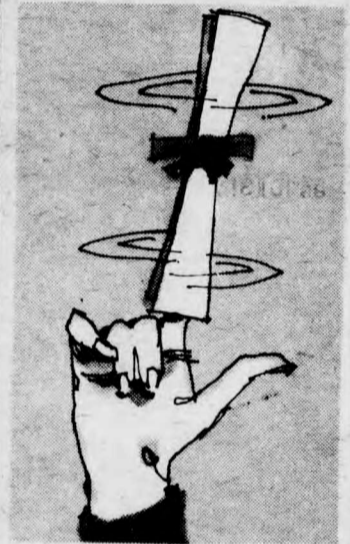
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