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Haunting antiwar film Handmade Hoskins

by Ira Nayman
The Raggedy Rawney directed by Bob Hoskins produced by Handmade Films
Bob knows acting. Bob knows writing. But, does Bob know anything about directing?
The Raggedy Rawney is the first directing effort by popular British actor Bob Hoskins (who also wrote the screenplay). On their first directing assignment, actors have a tendency to use odd angles, rapid camera movement and other extreme cinematographic tricks (check out Danny De Vito's *Throw Momma From the Train* for proof).
Happily, Hoskins avoids this pitfall: *The Raggedy Rawney* is a marvelous anti-war fable. Hoskins' direction is rarely showy, from the crisp night photography to magnificent countryside vistas, the direction is always in the service of telling a clear story.
And, what a story! A young man deserts from an army, dressing as

a woman in order to escape detection. Traumatized, unable to speak, he falls in with a band of gypsies trying to avoid army patrols; they mistake him for a rawney, a mad woman with magical powers. The man falls in love with a young gypsy woman, and shit happens.
The Raggedy Rawney is a charming tale, with fascinating scenes of make believe gypsy life, including a wedding and joyous farm work. The love story is understated (thank goodness!), but, in any case, is only one part of a rich fabric.
For, despite the sylvan countryside, despite the joy with which the gypsies live, war haunts every frame of the film. One scene early in the film involving a little girl playing with make-up in a barn is both innocent and shocking. Even at the happiest moments, the rawney's presence or the age and infirmities of the gypsy men (all the able bodied young men hav-

ing been pressed into military service) serve as a reminder of the effects of war.
As Bob Hoskins has stated, war is the real villain of the film. The time is not specific, although the gypsy's partially mechanized army suggests the present or the recent past; *The Raggedy Rawney* is a statement against all wars, fought at any time.
Bob Hoskins turns in his usual solid performance as Darky, the leader of the gypsies. But, it is Dexter Fletcher, in the title role, and Zoe Nathenson, as the young girl with whom he falls in love, who give the film its most heartfelt performances.
George Harrison's Handmade Films (*Time Bandits*, *Mona Lisa*, *Withnail and I*, *How To Get Ahead in Advertising*, and on, and on) has another winner on its hands. It almost makes you wish other multi-millionaire rock stars started film production companies.
Almost.



Zoe Nathenson (LEFT) and Dexter Fletcher (RIGHT) play young lovers in Bob Hoskins marvelous film about gypsies, war and apple wine, *The Raggedy Rawney*.

Cadillac Man: warmed over wonderful

by Ira Nayman
Cadillac Man directed by Roger Donaldson released by Orion Pictures
WARNING: The following review is rated R—part of the ending is REVEALED. For those who prefer not to know how a movie ends before seeing it, discretion is advised.
As science progresses, art seems to regress. Creating a film used to be like performing microsurgery on an ailing heart — a long, often painful process resulting in a stronger whole. These days, filmmakers are closer to Dr. Frankenstein, trying to create a functioning whole from various cast off body parts.
Consider the film *Cadillac Man*. It tells the story of Joey (Robin Williams), a womanizing car salesman who has to make the pitch of his life when a crazed

gunman (Tim Robbins) bursts into his showroom demanding to know which dealer slept with his wife. *Cadillac Man* has more than a few funny moments, some interesting drama and charming performances; you could do much worse for an evening's entertainment.
But, having Joey talk directly to the camera is more than a little reminiscent of Michael Caine in *Alfie*. The banter between salesmen could have come straight from *Tin Men*. The hostage taking scenario is a close relative of *Dog Day Afternoon*.
Even the performances, as good as they are, seem recycled.
Robbins, as Larry, adds a psychotic edge to what is basically a reprise of his character from *Bull Durham*. Williams, who is too likeable to be convincingly sleazy, isn't far removed from his character in *Dead Poet's Society*.
What's the point? Like photoc-

opies, films that borrow from other films are never as sharp as the originals. When Hollywood based more of their films on novels, at least something new was added to the formula.
Robin Williams continues to show signs of Woody Allen Disease: the illogical need for great comic performers to prove themselves as serious dramatic actors or directors. The reason seems obvious: while comedians may get the love, serious actors get the respect.
But, Williams either does not have the courage or is not being allowed to do straight dramatic roles; *Cadillac Man* is another of those movies where the drama is mitigated by wildly improvisational comedy scenes (like *Good Morning, Vietnam*). While Williams is not a bad actor, seeing him in more serious roles is like listening to Black Sabbath played on a Stradivarius.
That's just not what the instrument was made for.
And, the Hollywood ending is lame beyond belief! I ordinarily do not like to give away endings, but *Cadillac Man's* resolution, where everybody who bugged Williams throughout the film either gets something they want and goes away or walks up to him and says that all is forgiven, requires a response.
Cut it out.
There is no need (and less logic) to having Joey's shady friend drop in and forgive the \$20,000 debt Joey owes him. Joey, and the audience, should be allowed to simply revel in the fact that he is still alive. But, no — a half dozen plot complications are resolved in the final two minutes of the movie.
Cadillac Man is a very easy film to like. Unfortunately, it's a very hard film to justify.

No Future

So, you say you didn't like *Back to the Future, Part II* because it was too science fiction? Well, not to worry — not only does *Back to the Future, Part III* not have much science fiction, but it doesn't really have much that's different or original.
Future III has Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox, BELOW RIGHT) finding the time travelling DeLorean in 1955, and having to travel back to 1855 to save Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd, BELOW LEFT) from Biff Tannen's ancestor, Buford "Mad Dog" Tannen (both played by Thomas F. Wilson). Things are complicated when Doc falls in love with a schoolteacher (Mary Steenburgen, LEFT). Not to worry, though — the requisite happy ending arrives in time, complete with trite, superfluous moral.
Director Robert Zemeckis (RIGHT) has grafted his time travel story to the western, with indifferent results. The only original or interesting thing about *Back to the Future, Part III* is the ending, but it's not worth sitting through the rest of the film to get to.



IT'S FOR YOU: Robin Williams (LEFT) and Tom Robbins (RIGHT) play broken telephone in *Cadillac Man*.

Chopsticks and Matzo Balls Stereotypes do not make movie

by Jim Russell
Chopsticks and Matzo Balls directed by Peter Wang distributed by Festival Films
If you had ABSOLUTELY nothing to do one evening and were considering going to see *Chopsticks and Matzo Balls*, I would advise you instead to sit on your front porch and watch the cars pass by. Not only would you be putting your time to better use, but the traffic would be more "provocative, humorous and insightful" than this film claims to be.
Chopsticks and Matzo Balls, according to the press bump, is supposed to be a "film that makes fun of racial stereotypes and cultural differences," but the writer (Peter Wang) never makes use of the absurdities and contradictions inherent in the subject matter. Instead, the story becomes

bogged down by the very stereotypes Wang wanted to ridicule.
Granted, there are a lot of laughs in *Chopsticks and Matzo Balls*; unfortunately, they are confined to the actors laughing at their own jokes. No doubt, the movie was meant to be funny, but the story is handled in a decidedly "unfunny" manner.
Take, for example, the star of *Chopsticks and Matzo Balls*, Arthur Weiss (Marc Hayashi). Arthur is a brilliant, Oriental laser scientist whose spaced out Jewish mother thinks she's Oriental. Funny, eh?
And, then we have police Lieutenant Lu (Peter Wang — director, writer, actor), a guy with all the mannerisms of Inspector Clouseau, but none of the humour. He does, however, have a whole platoon of Keystone Kops under his command, including a black sergeant whose main contribution to the story is a recurring donkey laugh. Getting funnier?
Arthur has a brainy girlfriend (Maryann Urbano) who speaks eight languages and strives to attain the ultimate spiritual experience: orgasm via meditation. Great, eh? Can hardly catch your breath, eh? Wait! There's more! You see, Arthur gets so frustrated with his girlfriend's unwillingness to engage in conventional sex that he runs into a shower stall and masturbates.
Now, THAT'S FUNNY!

So much for the humour of *Chopsticks and Matzo Balls*. Now, let me turn your attention to the equally lame and inane "provocative and insightful" side of the film.
Arthur, after accidentally blasting a hole through his research partner's head, joins the ranks of the unemployed. He goes from job interview to job interview until he finally nets a job that needs his expertise to build a laser rifle.
Our hero is so happy to be gainfully employed that he never stops to ask himself, or his employer, what the rifle is going to be used for. It is only after the rifle has been successfully field tested that Arthur figures out that his employer is planning to use the weapon for nefarious purposes, and enlists the aid of Lieutenant Lu to thwart his plans.
Wang, who got the idea for this film from his real life as a laser technician troubled by his conscience, wanted to follow up his previous film, *The Great Wall*, with "funny movies that work on many levels." What he has instead given us is a 90 minute film in search of a reason for its own existence. It's a story with the moral "modern technology kills," to quote Lieutenant Lu, and that scientists shouldn't do research for military purposes. Now, that's novel.
You shouldn't assume, from what I've said so far, that *Chopsticks and Matzo Balls* has nothing going for it. True, the characterizations are paper thin, and the acting is solid walnut. Yes, the dialogue is so bad it's embarrassing.

And, yes, the cinematographer had difficulty focusing on moving targets, and the editor did join the scenes together with the same dexterity that I employ to hem the bottom of my pants.
Still, the lighting was good, and I really liked the way the opening credits flashed on the screen — very unique. So, if you're into snazzy credits and nice lighting, go ahead, spend your \$7.50.
I give *Chopsticks and Matzo Balls* a 000 out of 10, and it really doesn't matter where you put the dismal (sic) point.
Finding a sense of place
by Paul Gazzola
Foreign Nights directed by Izidore K. Musallam distributed by Norstar Entertainment Inc.
It would be easy to dismiss *Foreign Nights* as just another teenage-rebels-against-too-strict-father film, despite the ethnic twist that the family is Palestinian.
If the film had focused on Leila, the rebelling daughter, I would do just that. While she captures the confusion and uncertainty of someone forced to run away from home, Terri Hawkes simply lacks the rage or anger that goes along with the confusion. She spends too much of the film looking dazed and confused.
But, her father.
Having immigrated with his family to Toronto from Jerusalem, Youssef believes that he has adapted reasonably well to Canadian society without giving up his Palestinian identity. However, it is not until he has to deal with his daughter's rebellious behaviour that he starts to realize, and the viewer with him, that he has not really adapted to it at all. Youssef has merely left it outside the door when he goes home at night.
Youssef Abed-Alnour rescues *Foreign Nights* with his portrayal of Youssef. Strong and passionate, pathetic and brooding, Abed-Alnour gives a fine performance as a father trying to understand and deal with a daughter who is doing what he was never able to do.
Canadian-born, Leila respects her father's traditions, but is not willing to live her life as if she still lives in Jerusalem. Youssef is, at home, he wears traditional dress. He and his wife go to the homes of other Palestinian-Canadians where the children do traditional dances and refer to the United States as "The Great Satan."
"We did not come here as tourists, to see Niagara Falls," his friend, Morad, who has adapted to being both Canadian and Palestinian, tells him. Youssef, however, refuses to change his views that Western society is "against everything we believe."
More than anything, *Foreign Nights* is about finding a sense of place and the control and power that place gives you. If Leila is to have control over her life, she has to leave the place she occupies in her father's house.
The scene that sums up Youssef's plight is also possibly one that sums up the whole movie: Youssef and Morad are searching for Leila in the dregs of Toronto because Youssef, thinking the worst of his daughter, is convinced she has become a prostitute.
So, there they are, Morad sheepish and curious, Youssef aloof and self-righteous, looking at hookers. Inevitably, Youssef is propositioned; his refusal is indignant. Offended by his belittling attitude, the hooker, disturbing in her pancake make-up, challenges him.
"Are you afraid of me?" she yells. Youssef, possibly without realizing the significance of his answer, says yes. The prostitute represents all his fears; all the evil he sees in Western society. She is a person who has no use for his rules and traditions and, though in a twisted way, is an independent woman.
There's not much chance that Leila is going to become a prostitute or forsake her heritage, but the fact that she could and, there would be nothing he could do about it, agonizes Youssef. Simply by leaving Leila, Youssef's sense of place has changed, and with it, his control.



From left to right, Youssef Abed-Alnour, Mohammad Bacri and Paul Moravutti worry about Youssef's headstrong daughter in the Canadian film *Foreign Nights*.