

Crossing Delancey doesn't quite measure up

Crossing Delancey ★ ★ ½
Famous Players Westmount

review by Ron Kuipers

Boredom. That's what you feel when you go see an "intellectual" film that fails to deliver the goods. Not to say that every film has to make your blood race with excitement, but they should at least be interesting.

Such is not the case with *Crossing Delancey*. This film is, literally, a real sleeper. The film focuses on the dual lifestyle of an independent "eighties" New York woman. Apparently her struggle is

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between her "high-paced" West End lifestyle as a successful bookstore manager, and the slower-paced, traditional lifestyle of the Lower East Side where she grew up. Enter two men, a nosy grandmother, and presto, you have a plot.

The lamentable fact is that a trite lovers triangle-type plot such as this could still be salvaged if the characterizations were stronger. But here again the film comes up short. It is expressly clear that our sym-

pathies are to lie with Izzy, the independent New Yorker played by Amy Irving, yet all that the script and Irving manage to deliver is an indecisive, wishy-washy character who can't figure out what she wants from life. Torn between the flirtatious advances of a prominent writer and the stability offered by a more down to earth suitor, the film manages to externalize Izzy's struggle.

Instead of feeling sorry for Izzy, you end up disliking her, or worse, not caring about her one way or the other. She toys around with the "nice guy" and almost blows it before she realizes it is he, and not that famous womanizing writer, that she really wants. Maybe she just couldn't get over the fact that the "nice guy" sells

pickles for a living. But I guess selling pickles is pretty gross, and it would make us feel sorry for her. Right.

The only thing that surprised me was that this shmo decides to tag along for the duration of Izzy's rollercoaster ride, a journey described by Irving as "the plight of the independent, single woman of the eighties." Since when is the plight of women in the eighties nothing more than a nauseating manhunt? I'm sure there are many women out there who would take issue with this representation.

So, what do we have? Weak plot, weak characterization, and boredom. Not a pretty picture, is it? Well, to give the film its due there are some positive points to the

movie. The audience gets to see a different New York than usual; seen through the eyes of a traditional, Jewish cultural community, which is at the same time set against the modern sophisticated New York that is more familiar to the audience. Not all of the characters are weak either. Izzy's grandmother Bubbie, played by Reizl Bosyk, does much to add humour to the story, and help drive along a listless plot.

All things considered, *Crossing Delancey* is very disappointing. Almost all aspects of the film are weak and stilted in a movie that pretends to be stimulating. Watching it is like buying a box of expensive chocolate and finding nothing but Cracker Jacks inside, without the prize.

I thought that some really funny material could have come from the Krystick family household — Lilah having an especially obnoxious husband and three small girls — but the writers once again failed to capitalize on their chances, although a bit of Lilah's stage routine comes from supermarkets and babysitters. Not enough, though, or so I thought.

It won't be spoiling much if I point out that they made a really grave error in *Punchline* by including a brief romance between Steven and Lilah. If you decide to see this movie you will understand how very unnecessary this scene is to the plot. The movie reaches its low point when Gold proposes to Lilah — the audience *knows* nothing will come out of this mismatch!

The movie has a couple of other weak points but also some strong as well. Fortunately, the screenwriter's flaws are covered fairly capably (when possible) by great acting. Field and especially Hanks give everything they have to their roles, and *Punchline* does pick up a bit in the last half hour. Director David Seltzer did well to line up a talented supporting cast of characters from the REAL stand-up comedy world — they give the movie a lot of life and it's too bad we don't see more of them. On the whole though, *Punchline* ends up being a half-decent movie, and is worth the money (even if you don't go on Tuesday) for the exceptional acting.

Punchline is missing something

Punchline ★ ★ ½
Cineplex-Odeon

review by Alexandra Parr

What inspires the laughs in a stand-up comedian's routine? Woody Allen once said of the humor in his movies, "the laughs don't come from jokes, they come from people in emotionally desperate situations." If this is true, then the rather screwed-up lives of would-be comedians like Lilah Krystick and Steven Gold *should* be the basis for very funny material indeed. Whether or not the new David Seltzer film *Punchline* succeeds in this respect is another matter.

The film certainly has the right essential ingredients. Playing Lilah, a New Jersey housewife-by-day and potential comedy queen-by-night, is the very talented Sally Field, who won Oscars for her performances in *Places in the Heart* and *Norma Rae*. Field researched the stand-up comedy scenes extensively in preparation for this role, and although she is often overshadowed by her co-star, she is still a delight in the role of a very ordinary woman who decides to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a comedienne.

Steven Gold, a med school dropout for whom comedy is the reference point of life, is played by Tom Hanks — an actor that director Ron Howard (*Splash*) described as "a terrific leading man... a funny guy who makes you care." Oddly enough, although Hanks was almost a natural in the role of a stand-up comic, Steven Gold's life is too boring and his personality is too nasty for me to really care about him at all.

I'm not sure if my expectations of *Punchline* were too high or if, as I suspect, many of the jokes were not particularly funny. True, the movie is not supposed to be just a series of comedy sketches — like, for example, Eddie Murphy's *Raw* or *Delirious*. The movie is billed as a "bittersweet comedy", and perhaps it is; there *are* some quite humorous scenes in it. However, there may have been something wrong with the screenwriting, because although Steven Gold is supposed to be the hottest new comedian in New York, no one in the theatre audience laughed much during his stints on stage; perhaps we weren't sophisticated enough? Certainly the audience at The Gas Station (the comedy club in *Punchline*) found Gold hilarious; but then again, they didn't have a choice.

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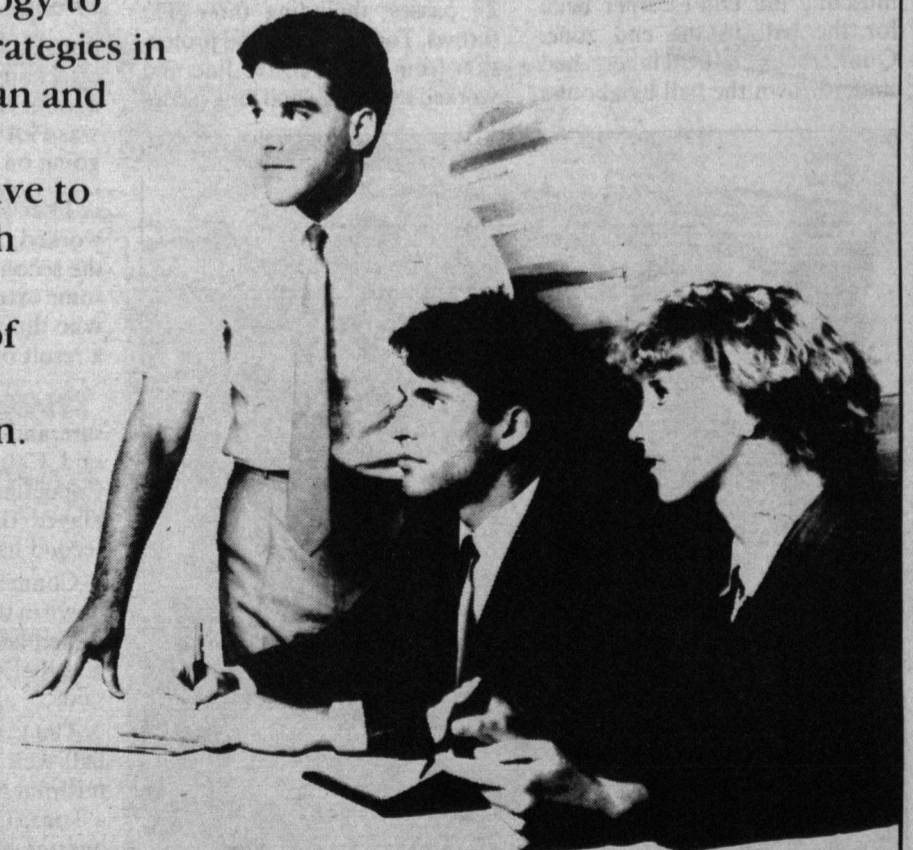
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