



Walter Matthau and Dan Aykroyd in *The Couch Trip*

## SNL members can't save film

**The Couch Trip**  
Orion Pictures  
Capilano, Westmount, West Mall 8, Whitemud

review by David Smith

The art of film making and the study of psychology both originated at about the same moment in history. Michael Ritchie's new movie *The Couch Trip* is a pure example of how not to mix two random elements such as these. My guess is that Ritchie assumed that the whole would be greater than the sum of its parts. Well, he was wrong.

Ritchie's career as a director has had its ups and downs. He has had major hits (*Fleisch and Semi-Tough*) and major flops (*The Island and Student Bodies*), so failure is nothing new to him. *The Couch Trip* will undoubtedly go down on his record as less than successful, mostly because Ritchie chose to make the film almost completely from formula: there is nothing new here.

The basic premise is that John W. Burns (Dan Aykroyd) is a convicted computer fraud felon who made his way from prison to the Cicero Correctional Institute for Men by

acting crazy (in much the same way that Jack Nicholson did in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). From there, he impersonates his way into a high paying radio therapy show in Beverly Hills, where he gives straight talk to distressed listeners. And when the mood moves him, he packs them all up into a fleet of buses (categorized according to neurosis) and takes them all to a baseball game. There is a lot of space in this film for good honest humour, but Ritchie fails to realize its potential. All (and I mean all) of the psychiatry jokes are stale and Ritchie delivers them in heavy doses.

Neither Dan Aykroyd nor Walter Matthau do a substantial job with their roles as societal misfits caught between the cracks in the mental health system. Aykroyd fairly walked through the film, shooting off fast one-liners that the audience rarely picked up. In fact, most of the laughter in the theatre was in response to the grotesquely obvious and uncomfortable humour that neurosis jokes rely on. And Matthau is wasted in his role as a former minister whose single fall from grace has resulted in his career as an airport prophet. He spends his days outside the arrivals terminal saying things like "no man is so tall as when he stoops to pet a plant". It is

an utter waste of refined talent.

In the course of the film you will notice a great number of past and present Saturday Night Live cast members in various roles; Chevy Chase even pops up in a television commercial at one point. By the end of the film it is very obvious what director Michael Ritchie assumed: if you can put a lot of established comedians into one film (especially people from SNL), then there's no way you can make an unfunny movie. What Ritchie has done instead is concocted a mishmash of bad sight gags and one-liners

delivered by people who are accustomed to delivering semi-humorous sight gags and one-liners.

Truthfully, I could not finish this piece without commenting on Donna Dixon, a woman who has proven that even people without talent can make it in Hollywood. Without a doubt, her performance on the screen is an absence, her delivery an intolerance, and her dialect contrived. But as long as her marriage to Aykroyd holds up, I'm pretty sure we'll be seeing more of them together for some time. Pity.

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