Mandel's talents are squandered in "Walk Like a Man"

WALK LIKE A MAN
Directed by Melvin Frank.
Written by Robert Klane.
Starring Howie Mandel, Christopher Lloyd, Cloris Leachman, Colleen Camp, and Amy Steel.
At the Beacon Hill, Cleveland Circle, and Somerville (Assembly Square) theaters.

Some of the bits and gags in this movie are hilarious. Howie Mandel is a superb comic, and this movie has some of what could certainly be considered his best work. The script, however, calls for about 30 minutes more of "training Bobo" than there are jokes to fill the time. Even so, the sparsity of good bits is not what kills this movie.

There is simply too much stereotyping in each of the characters for them to be funny -- they just come across as pathetic. The whole family of Shands is basically messed up. Reggie is completely disliked and has lost all of his share of the family inheritance by gambling it away. Rhonda is a complete lush: apparently she started drinking right around when Reggie lost his money. Reggie and Bobo's mother, Margareta Shand (Cloris Leachman), is a complete ditz who lost all her marbles after losing her son.

The most believable character in the movie, strangely enough, is Bobo. Even Penny, supposedly the straight character, changes from sympathetic, to noble, to in love with Bobo, all too quickly for us to believe her.

Basically, this movie is about 88 minutes of set-up time for one incredibly funny gag and a few surrounding cute jokes. I would say that the movie is worth the time to see it, but not worth the money. Waiting for this movie to hit its second run would probably be the best decision.

The Interview
Fancy hotels and movie stars was the order of the day. Howie Mandel was holding a press conference in order to publicize his latest movie and I was cordially invited. I punctured a class, boarded the MBTA, and soon found myself outside the Four Seasons Hotel, one of the poshest in the downtown area.

Mandel arrived in the deserted hotel lobby carrying a pack of disposable razors from the gift shop. He was unshaven, perhaps to give the reporters a glimpse of what he would look like for the first part of the movie.

He was on a schedule even the most sturdy MIT student would admire -- publicizing his movie during his spare time while on a 28-shows-in-31-days tour. He seemed confident of the success of the movie, which was surprising since MGM was publicizing this movie with all the resources saved for movies that are going to need good publicity.

One of the points that came out repeatedly in both the interview and in the press materials was that Mandel had to train in order to be capable of walking on all fours for the days upon days of shooting. In all, he was able to arrive at the peak of canine duplication. Unfortunately, even that could not save this movie from dragging.

Howie Mandel in "Walk Like a Man."

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