My Cousin Vinny’s courtroom is funny, but unrealistic

My Cousin Vinny
Directed by Jonathan Lynn.
Written by Dale Launer.
Starring Joe Pesci, Ralph Mecrihino.
and Marisa Tomei.
By Danny Su

The press kit for My Cousin Vinny reads, “There have been many courtroom dramas that have glorified the great American legal system. My Cousin Vinny isn’t one of them.” Yes, this film does not glorify the American legal system. In fact, the movie simply lacks any substance other than the performances of Joe Pesci and Marisa Tomei. As with most courtroom dramas, My Cousin Vinny relies on the premise that the audience lacks any knowledge of courtroom procedures. Unfortunately, I do have some ideas about how the legal system operates. Still, I do find My Cousin Vinny to be a funny yet unrealistic courtroom drama.

Joe Pesci, who won an Oscar for his role in Goodfellas, plays a New York lawyer, Vincent Gambini, who attempts to defend two college kids who are charged with murder in a small town in Alabama. Unfortunately, he has never tried a case before, and it has taken him six attempts to pass the bar exam.

Although Pesci is fabulous, Vincent Gambini does not come across as a convincing character. First, Gambini lacks knowledge of even the simplest courtroom procedures. When asked by the judge (Fred Gwynne) whether his client will plead guilty or not guilty during the arraignment, Vincent gives up the case as the instant of simply saying “not guilty.” Despite numerous instructions from the judge, Vincent does not follow standard procedures and is eventually found in contempt of court — a common occurrence for him. The movie would then have us believe that Vincent’s so stupid he does not know the prosecution must disclose all information to him. If he truly is that incompetent, then the judge should have ordered someone else to represent the defendants because they are not being represented. For all such incidents never do occur and Vincent is given the chance of learning on the fly.

Fortunately, Stan (Mitchell Whitfield), one of the two defendants, is alerted by Vincent’s incompetence and requests a public defender. Although the public defender looks smooth and able, he has one minor problem. He gets very nervous in court and stutters. As a result of his incoherent speech, he gets nothing accomplished. Well, maybe there are people who share the same problem, but how could the state of Alabama be so blind as to make him a public defender and jeopardize the rights of the accused?

As the trial moves on, Vincent suddenly becomes the best attorney money can buy.

My Cousin Vinny brings the courtroom alive with humor but without credibility.

Billiards bridges the gap between sports and entertainment

P odd is a strange pastime. The famous English philosopher Herbert Spencer once said, “To play billiards well is the sign of an ill-spent youth.” Billiards has never quite reached American spectator sport status nor gained the respect that comes with that status. Instead, it sort of falls into that area of limbo somewhere between athletic sports and evening entertainment. To the extent that it fills the latter description, the arts section of The Tech is pleased to inform you of the upcoming Beanpot Tournament at the Boston Billiard Club.

The second annual tournament is being held to benefit the Student Environmental Action Coalition. Over the next several weeks, five-member teams from over a dozen Boston-area colleges — including MIT — will be competing in the tournament. This Tuesday night, MIT student teams will compete against each other for a place in the championship finals, to be held Tuesday, April 7. According to one of the most helpful and persistent public relations representatives I have dealt with in my tenure as an arts editor, Beanpot is still accepting entries from MIT teams.

The success of last year’s tournament was testimony that even as Beanpot has contributed to a worthy cause in last year’s life. The Beanpot Tournament made a $5,000 donation to the name of winning team to Families in Transition, a shelter for homeless families. That winning team, the champions of ill-spent youth, was the one from MIT.

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