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**The Man:
Is More Like a Mouse**

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER

The Man, about a dental supply salesman (Eugene Levy) who unintentionally partners up with a Federal agent (Samuel L. Jackson), belongs to the genre known as the buddy picture. More specifically, it falls within the phylum commonly referred to as the salt 'n' pepper film. Such pairings are usually meant to be both instructive and humorous, though you couldn't tell it from this mouse of a movie.

While the lacklustre *Salt and Pepper* (1968) featuring Rat-Packers Sammy Davis, Jr. and Peter Lawford popularized the notion, the best example by which to measure all other farcical entries in the genre is *Silver Streak* (1976), starring Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder. On the straight dramatic side, Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis in *The Defiant Ones* (1958) remain the duo to beat.

The Man, dropped down to this paragraph because it doesn't deserve to share space with either of those two, evinces not even the slightest dash of their filmic DNA. The chemistry never flows in earnest. The direction is non-distinct. And to state that the writing is uninspired is too kind.

Pity is, it looked so good on paper. Eugene Levy and Samuel L. Jackson? Better dipoles there have rarely been. The tagline is great: "One guy walks the walk. The other talks and talks. Only one of them can be..."

But it's all downhill from there. Mr. Levy quickly establishes his suburban breadwinner persona. He is Andy Fiddler, the common man extraordinaire... a hero not only in his own home, but in the wild and woolly world of dental supply sales as well. And it's just that fame that has him traveling to Detroit, where he's slated to address a convention of his peers.

Naturally, as the contrivances of mediocre movies would dictate, a case of mistaken identity puts him up close and personal with Samuel L. Jackson's special agent Derrick Vann. Of course, he is the nerd's direct antithesis, right down to his bad attitude. Divorced and knowing not the slightest thing about the piousette his little daughter is trying to perfect, he's even a bit angrier than usual.

You see, his partner was recently killed. Dealers in contraband, woefully played and led by the perfunctorily evil Kane (Luke Goss), are the chief suspects. And now Fiddler's accidental embroilment in this world of high-stakes gunrunning is only confounding matters for the hair-trigger Fed.

Don't say that you could have written this script. You're made of much better stuff. But, if you just happen to be screenwriter Jim Piddock, Margaret Oberman or Stephen Carpenter, then your penchant was to go right ahead and have Andy and Derrick do standard role reversal no. 101. Only, just to be difficult and bewildering in the bargain, you did it half-heartedly.

What happened? It's as if someone went out for donuts in the middle of the writing, took a piece of the screenplay with her and forgot to come

back.

Only moderately fazed by the turn of events, both on and off screen, and yacking throughout the doings, Levy's salesman continually attempts to make friends with his involuntary associate. Jackson's special agent will have none of it. He is merely menacing. His visage stays set on the same slow burn for the duration.

Missing the whole point, the film is proof that two actors working in separate vacuums do not a buddy flick make. A good script doctor might have painted Vann a bit more self-effacing once his new pal makes the genial overture. That failing, the alternative would be to give comedian Levy a lot more jokes and just let him run with the ball. But then there's always the politics of Hollywood to consider. Doubtless, Jackson's camp would have frowned upon such strategic upstaging.

Granted, there are a few laughs, though never quite enough to go around. Yet even sadder, the getting-to-know you aspect of the movie remains stuck in low gear.

You feel like launching up to the stage, filtering through the screen, pulling both principals into a huddle and explaining: "Look...this is a salt 'n' pepper, buddy movie. As disparate as your cultures are, as diverse as your folkways and mores may be, you're supposed to represent hope."

Well, isn't that what the cliché mandates? We have become inured to the hackneyed. Offering up a salt 'n' pepper movie containing virtually no spice, *The Man* does nothing to amend that mindset.

The Man, rated PG-13, is a New Line Cinema release directed by Les Mayfield and stars Samuel L. Jackson, Eugene Levy and Luke Goss. Running time: 84 minutes

County Hosts Arts & Healing Conference

COUNTY - Can visual art heal the mind? County residents are invited to find out what leading researchers and practitioners discovered at an interactive day-long conference for mental health and social service providers, healthcare administrators, educators and artists.

"Visual Art and the Mind: An Arts & Well Being Initiative" will take place on Friday, October 21, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Hilton Hotel, 1170 Spring Street (Route One), Elizabeth. Pre-registration is required.

The fee for early registration by Wednesday, September 28 (and students with current I.D.) is \$79 per person, which includes continental breakfast, lunch, snacks and all materials. Registration after September 28 is \$90. Registration on the day of the conference is \$110.

Attendees will learn new strategies to reduce stress and anxiety and promote mental health as well as participate in the second annual interactive educational forum where they will learn how to infuse the healing power of the visual arts into their daily work.



GRAND FINALE...Ms. Janet Lyman conducts the 2004-2005 NJWA Symphony Orchestra members in their final concert.

Pat Brentano Takes Deep Look Into Woods

WESTFIELD - Westfield artist Pat Brentano will be a visiting artist with the Weir Farm Trust Visual Artists Program in Connecticut. Five large drawings and two sculptures based on the deep forest at night will be on exhibit at the Housatonic Museum of Art in Bridgeport, Conn., Thursday, September 15 through Friday, November 4.

The 38-by-50-inch graphite and charcoal drawings were inspired by the meadows of tall grass and dense forest of her childhood spent in Indiana. Their texture and gesture hint at what is hidden in the fields.

Ms. Brentano is an adjunct professor of drawing at Kean University.



Pat Brentano's "Forest Sentinel"



COOL CAT... "Cat in cool shoes." artwork by Peri-Anne Richmond-Taylor of Villas. She is one of 110 fine artists, photographers and craftspeople at the upcoming 18th annual Fall Fine Art and Crafts at Nomahegan Park on Saturday and Sunday, October 1 to 2 in Cranford.

Nomahegan Showcases Jewelry Exhibitors

CRANFORD - The eighteenth annual Fall Fine Art and Crafts at Nomahegan Park show will take place on Saturday and Sunday, October 1 and 2, in Cranford across from Union County College.

The show will feature many new artists and crafters from throughout the northeast and beyond, displaying and selling their American-made handcrafted work. This show is free to the public and will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., rain or shine.

The show will feature fine art, photography, weaving, clothing, pottery, wood, fiber, leather, stained glass and much more. The show will be accented with live music by the Barley Boys Band a variety of ethnic foods.



Boy Gets Girl, Kean University's Premiere Stages

Local Libraries Report Stellar Summer Reading

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written For The Westfield Leader and The Times

Several hundred area children had the opportunity to experience the joy of summer reading by participating in "Dragons, Dreams and Daring Deeds," a reading program sponsored by the national organization "Summer Reading Collaborative" and endorsed by the New Jersey State Library in Trenton.

The Westfield Memorial Library, Scotch Plains Public Library, Free Public Library of Mountainside and Fanwood Memorial Library all participated in the program, along with libraries in 30 other states.

At Westfield Memorial Library, 620 elementary school-aged youngsters took part in "Dragons, Dreams and Daring Deeds," while 126 teens participated in "Joust Read," the teenage component of the program, which in Westfield was offered online. In addition, the library offered a "Little Listeners" program for those too young to read. The number of books read to them measured their progress.

"Since numerous studies tell us that children who read for fun during the summer do better in school the next year, we are thrilled to have been able to make this happen and make a difference for so many Westfield kids," said Kathy Muhm, Children's Librarian.

The Scotch Plains Public Library also conducted separate summer reading programs based on age. Two hundred and fourteen children, from preschool through elementary school, participated in "Dragons, Dreams and Daring Deeds," while 38 middle schoolers were enrolled in "Joust Read."

The library kicked off its program in June with an opening party that included story telling and a skit performed by members of the library staff.

A variety of activities such as puppet shows, juggling demonstrations and creative writing classes were offered to participants throughout the summer.

"We were very pleased with the community's response to our programs. The children who participated read steadily each week and maintained participation throughout the six-week program. Our young adult programs were also very successful," said Children's Librarian Michelle Willis.

"Over the past year we have worked to expand the materials we have available to young adults and to make the library more appealing to them," she added. "Based upon the enthusiastic response to the summer reading program, we will continue to schedule new programs for young adults."

Ninety-one children from preschool age through the second grade took part in the "Dragons Dreams and Daring Deeds" program at the Free Public Library of Mountainside, according to Linda Corona, the

library's Public Services Librarian. Younger children kept tabs of books read or read to them, while older readers monitored their reading minutes. Ms. Corona reported that a total of 1,763 books were either read by or read to participants, and older readers clocked in a whopping 883 hours and 15 minutes of summer reading.

"This year, children participated in greater numbers. They were really enthused about the theme. This year's reading figures exceed last year's," said Ms. Corona.

Fanwood Memorial Library gave its summer reading program a theatrical twist when it offered its young readers a drama workshop entitled "Dragons, Dreams and Drama." Twenty youngsters in grades 5 through 9 participated.

The program came to an end in August with the production of The Dreadful Dragon by Margaret Wylie Brydon. In addition to those involved in the drama workshop, 100 additional children took part in "Dragons, Dreams and Daring Deeds."

"I feel it is such a service for children to have a place to read which will help them perceive the joys of reading for pleasure," said Susan Staub, the Fanwood Memorial Library's Children's Librarian.



FRIDAY MORNING STRING ENSEMBLE...String musicians who are interested in sharing their talents are invited to participate in the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts Friday Morning String Ensemble. Violin, viola, bass and cello players can join together on Friday mornings, from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m., at 150-152 East Broad Street in Westfield. The ensemble, directed by Dr. Ted Schlosberg (pictured above), is a non-tuition program, funded by the NJWA Curriculum Development Fund. Call (908) 789-9696 for an interview.

Robert Costa's 'Collective Intelligence' On Display

CRANFORD - Union County College is hosting an exhibition of works by five artists, Lisa Bateman, Norm Francoeur, DB Lampman, Doreen McCarthy and Aaron Yassin. Entitled, "Collective Intelligence," through Wednesday, November 23.

The exhibition is hung in the Commons on the College's Cranford campus at 1033 Springfield Avenue. Due to extensive renovations being made to the MacKay Library, the Tomasulo's offerings are being moved from the gallery space to various venues on the Cranford Campus.

"Collective Intelligence" is a

project of *Art in Plain View*, and rallies the efforts of five visual artists of different styles and disciplines to explore collaboration as a part of the creative process. The works consist of a giant pod, suggesting an alien origin, and a 100-foot long checkered windsock situated amongst clusters of brightly colored geometric inflatables.

Video surveillance cameras simultaneously relay fragments of this aerial landscape to four TV monitors. The mixed media installation hangs from the ceiling trusses of the UCC Commons.

TAKE THE STAGE

Premiere Stages' Realistic Boy Gets Girl Mesmerizes

By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY
Specially Written For The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD - In the real world, stories don't always end "happily ever after." This is one of the truisms shared in *Boy Gets Girl* by playwright Rebecca Gilman that Premiere Stages, the professional Actors' Equity Association (AEA) theatre program at Kean University presents through this weekend, September 22 through 25.

The play starts out simply with a blind date. Now a blind date is perfectly safe if arranged by people who know you both, if you meet in a public place and if you don't give out too much personal information. We all know those blind date rules and usually abide by them in the ever-changing world of online dating match-ups.

Ms. Gilman's heroine, Theresa Bedell, a high-powered writer for a magazine in New York City, meets her blind date Tony at a noisy bar. He seems to be a nice enough computer geek and knows a friend of a friend. Excellent. Theresa doesn't give him her home phone number and doesn't let him take her home. She's no dope.

She does all the right things. But somehow, everything goes terribly wrong.

Tony misreads cues, sends her endless floral bouquets at work and won't listen to her resounding "no." Her clear rejection only fans his passion and he winds up obsessed. As he stalks her, audience members squirm with identification.

Producing Artistic Director John Wooten offers this last show of the 2005 season as something entirely different from the other two Equity shows that preceded it. The two-act play has an especially strong second act that propels the audience to the edge of their seats.

Wooten has assembled a stellar cast that is able to display how this terrifying situation affects not just the person being stalked, but the ones around him/her.

Erika Sheffer is the credible lead, Theresa, who is so consumed by her career that she really "doesn't have time for a relationship." The "in control" façade she projects is all the more believable as she unravels before our eyes.

Stalker Tony, played by John M. Vazquez, 3rd, is just enough of a novice at dating for us to assume, at first, he just doesn't know appropriate dating bounds. Mr. Vazquez's

realistic awkwardness on their first date echoes initial date jitters we have all experienced.

Carl Wallnau plays Theresa's boss wonderfully well. Through the whole experience, his confident, professional character pauses to reflect sympathetically on how he might have victimized women in his life.

Theresa's colleague Mercer, the extremely talented Chris Henry Coffey, wants to write about her troubles for the magazine, which makes her feel violated all over again. He, too, comes to see her unfortunate plight by the final scene.

Kean University Chairman of the Department of Theatre Holly Rhoades develops the character of Detective Beck. In Act I, Beck is stereotypically all business because she thinks it's just a routine case she has encountered. When Theresa and the detective meet in the park in Act II, however, the canned speeches Beck has rehearsed for victims take on a layer of warmth as the two exchange haunting biographical information.

Lacey Jones supplies comic relief in this dark piece with her high platform wedge shoes, naïveté and inappropriate business clothes.

Les Kennkat, an ailing, lecherous porno filmmaker played by James Alward, is alternately funny and pathetic. He is a Hugh Hefner caricature who has found his niche filming women's breasts, and can't be anything but that caricature.

Nadine Charlsen, who teaches set design, lighting design, scene painting and stage management at Kean, proves that she can produce what she asks of her students. Her multifaceted set is both functional and visually interesting, with revolving panels and full scene sets that are exchanged effortlessly.

Boy Gets Girl is about the masks we all don and the facades we all wear for protection. It is a story of how the sexes treat each other as much as a tale of recognizable victims and predators.

The audience keeps hoping that everything will turn out right in the end. In real life, and in the verisimilitude of this play, that only happens in the world of fantasy.

See it in Color:
www.goleader.com

WF's Beth Painter's CDW Spreads Passion of Acting

WESTFIELD - Beth Painter of Westfield is doing her best to spread her passion for acting to children in and around Westfield. Beth, an actress, graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and NJ State certified teacher, is opening the Contagious Drama Workshop (CDW). Classes will begin in early fall at the Presbyterian Church of Westfield.

Parents who want to channel their children's creative curiosity will be pleased to learn about the classes that Beth is working on. When describing the benefits of acting for children, Ms Painter said, "acting is a creative outlet that gives children the opportunity to play and perform; at the same time, it helps build self esteem and communication skills, as well as encourages active listening."

In addition to private coaching, Ms.

Painter's CDW will offer two programs, one for young children and one for elementary and middle school students. *Story Stretchers* is a program geared for children four to five years old and is designed to help children make real connections between literature and the arts in a hands-on fashion. Each class will immerse the children in creative activities such as acting, movement, or music using a story as a catalyst.

Act Out! is the acting class for older children. The classes will include theater games, improvisation, character study, monologues and short scene study.

Story Stretchers will be held 10 to 11 a.m. and *Act Out!* will take place 3:45 to 5 p.m., both on Wednesdays. For more information and to reserve a space, contact Beth Painter at (917) 836-3740 or contagiousdrama@yahoo.com

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