

Arts & Entertainment

POPCORN™ Barbershop: Provides Cutting Humor

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 & 1/2 popcorns

When *Barbershop* has all its chairs spinning at full comedic tilt, the ensemble chorus of urban caricatures who populate the film's South Side Chicago gathering place inevitably cuts to the hilarious truth. The barbs fly fast and furious; the jokes are plentiful.

Hopeful but savvy, the conversation spans the spectrum of topics, with a heartfelt notion behind every cynical sentiment and a sarcastic jab woven into each congenial emotion. The laughs rise in a crescendo, dissipate, and then re-build with each new argument.

But director Tim Story's convivially embracing entertainment subtly makes it understood that, while enchanting to the funny bone, there is gravity in Mark Brown's screenplay. That there are matters of great consequence at stake, even in its most lighthearted moments. Therein lies the wit.

Too bad the overly simplistic plot is just a frame from which to hang the film's sociological ruminations. And too bad the production standards could have benefited from a larger budget and a bit more experience. Otherwise, *Barbershop* might have been even more effective than it is in making its points and enamoring us of its resident philosophers.

Through, it is hard to imagine Cedric the Entertainer being any more disarming than he is as Eddie, the curmudgeonly humanitarian who mispronounces seniority whilst explaining his rightful advantages as the shop's elder statesman.

Declaring that "nobody is exempt" (from scrutiny) in the barbershop, throughout the script wise old Eddie abashes his compatriots in a series of no-holds-barred diatribes.

Launching an entreaty against self-delusion, he draws wincing from his pals when he boldly informs: "And that's right...O.J. did it. You know he did it." And then he ventures even further, leaving no sacred cow safe from his acerbic contemplations.

Cedric's one-man backlash against political correctness, that hideous euphemism for grass-roots fascism, is delightfully liberating. Because when movies capture our imaginations, they kindle our dreams.

Thus, for a brief, empowering moment, *Barbershop's* refreshing honesty allows us to indulge in a hopeful fantasy. If such candor were to leap from the screen and permeate our real-life existence, surely the enmity between the races would dissipate. Well...no harm in wishing.

While we're waiting for that sublime cinematic byproduct to manifest itself, director Story's warmhearted allegory sure is funny.

Spreading the good will and humor by virtue of their vulnerable humanity, in addition to Eddie the denizens of *Barbershop* include: Jimmy James (Sean Patrick Thomas), the college grad with a slightly superior attitude in need of adjustment; Terri Jones (Eve), the shop's only female, currently suffering from a case of man trouble; and Ricky (Michael Ealy), the intelligent ex-con whose integrity is a question mark.

Plus, there's Isaac Rosenberg (Troy Garity), the young white barber who's submersion into ghetto mores and folkways draws criticism from some; and last but not least, there's Calvin (Ice Cube), the disgruntled proprietor who inherited the business from his dad.

Fed up with what he sees as a plight instead of an opportunity, Calvin has aspirations of making it in the music business. In one early scene, impatient with the crew whom he views not as colleagues but as useless hangers-on, he indignantly asks, "Do I look like my father?" To a man, they all nod in the affirmative. They count on him.

So it predictably follows that the ensuing ghetto fable concerns itself with Calvin, his ambitions, the good of the group, and matters of posterity. Switch the same theme to Middle America, circa 1930s and 40s, and we are reminded of George Bailey (*It's a Wonderful Life, 1946*) and his disdain for the Building and Loan that keeps him from setting the world on fire.

In fact, give it a little more thought and we see that the tale's appeal is in its bittersweet universality.

Certainly, there are few words sadder than "What might have been." But there's also something to be said for "Que sera, sera." Take me for instance.

As a young boy, I yearned for the day when I would grow up and sell carpet at one of those big highway outlets. But instead, I'm writing this film criticism column. Granted, it may not be as glorious a path as I had hoped to carve. But without a movie about me to show how this is all part of some grand eternal plan, I'll just have to trust that there is rhyme and reason to my fate.

In *Barbershop*, Calvin tries to rearrange his destiny by clandestinely selling the tontorial parlor to local hood Lester (Keith David). What he doesn't know at the time is that the gangster is planning to use the shop as a front for something a little less reputable.

Thus, when Eddie learns of the impetuous deed, the oratorical sparks fly. The conscience of the story, he lectures on the importance of the barbershop and what it means to the neighborhood. Ostensibly stating a case for preserving the things you've come to cherish and believe in over the years, he waxes nostalgic, explaining how the barbershop is the closest thing the inner-city black man has to a country club. There isn't a dry eye in the house.

Problem is, even if Calvin does see the error of his ways, is Lester going to relinquish his coup? After all, we're not dealing with a sentimental fellow here. So this is where the script occasionally runs into trouble.

While some aspects of *Barbershop* are dead serious and some are comical, others, like a running gag/sub-plot about two fools (Anthony Anderson

and Lahmard J. Tate) who hijack an ATM machine, are playfully cartoonish. That's okay...when it works...when the moods mix. But when it doesn't and they don't, the incongruity is evident, as is the case with Lester. If he's supposed to be representative of true adversarial evil, then he must be bad all the time. If he isn't, then we don't really have a plot.

But what we might have is the makings of a hit Broadway show, where said inconsistencies could be swallowed up by musical numbers (preferably a combination of traditional and rap songs) and eye-filling sets.

The thought is that film may not even be *Barbershop's* best venue. Just conjecture, mind you, but if the movie continues to draw big audiences, it's not beyond the realm of possibility.

In fact, the whole idea recalls *The Producers (1968)*, another movie that flew in the face of political correctness. For some, it was anathema simply to utter the song title, "Springtime for Hitler," let alone sing it. Today, I'm told you can't get tickets. Not even if you're a world-famous carpet salesman.

Barbershop, rated PG-13, is an MGM Pictures release directed by Tim Story and stars Ice Cube, Cedric the Entertainer, and Eve. Running time: 102 minutes.



Get Outta The House

By CAROL F. DAVIS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Cranford will be offering a weekend of activities. On Saturday, September 28, there will be an *Annual Town-Wide Garage Sale* from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The rain date is Saturday, October 5. For information, please call (908) 276-3530. If you still have the energy after that, the next day, Sunday, will be the *Cranford Autumn Antique Fair*. Between the hours of 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., the train station will be filled with antiques, collectibles, and appraisers. The admission is free, and it's a rain or shine event. Call (908) 709-7208 for details.

From 2 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, September 29, Westfield's Miller-Cory House Museum will be open for demonstrations and tours. The theme will be *"Salamanders, Spiders & Other Colonial Kitchen Gadgets."* Admission to the museum is \$2 for adults; 50 cents for students; children under six are free. Call the museum for more information at (908) 232-1776.

A Kid's Forum at the Forum Theatre Company in Metuchen will present the musical production *Thumbelina and Other Tall Tales*, beginning on Saturday, October 5, and running through Saturday, November 2. This play consists of four enchanted tales, and they are all based on the stories of Hans Christian Anderson. All tickets are \$12, and seating is reserved. For tickets and information, please call (732) 548-0582. If you purchase a t-shirt for your child, the cast members will sign it following the show.

For boating enthusiasts summer may be over, but you can look forward to next season by attending the *New Jersey Fall Boat Show*, featuring over 250 boats, and more than 45 manufacturers. There will also be a vast variety of boating and marine products from marine electronics to boating equipment/supplies, T-tops to kayaks, inboard to outboard engines, marinas to engine repair/service and more. The show will be held all weekend (September 27-29) at the New Jersey Convention & Expo Center, 97 Sunfield Avenue, in Edison. Admission is \$5 to \$8, and you may get your discount coupon by visiting www.macevents.com. You can also call for more information at (800) 332-3976.

It's *Apple Harvest Time* at Liberty Hall. For the next two weekends, visitors will have an opportunity to pick their own apples from their large orchard, in addition to touring the estate. There is an added charge for the harvest, and, of course, it all depends on how ready the fruit is for pickin'. Liberty Hall Museum is located at 1003 Morris Avenue in Union, across from Kean University. Call them at (908) 527-0400.

My Take on It With Kerriane Spellman Cort

Some Emmy Shockers, Conan's Quips Keep Audience On Toes

By KERRIANNE SPELLMAN CORT
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

FANWOOD — This past Sunday evening, the 54th annual Emmy Awards aired on NBC, celebrating excellence in acting, writing and directing for the small screen.

For the past several years, The Outstanding Comedy Series win was a bit of a shocker. NBC's "Friends" was honored this time around, and many feel that this was due to the fact that the beloved show is in its final season. The cast is precious, the writing is witty, but I don't feel that "Friends" is necessarily a better show than NBC's "Will and Grace" or HBO's "Curb your Enthusiasm."

Jennifer Aniston of "Friends" also won this season for Best Actress in a Comedy. She is a good actress, there is no question. She is beautiful, adorable and clearly America's sweetheart. However, nominated with such powerhouses as Jane Kaczmarek, Patricia Heaton, Debra Messing and Sarah Jessica Parker, the Aniston win raised a few eyebrows.

Michael Chiklis won Best Actor in a Drama Series for his work in FX Network's "The Shield." This was also unprecedented. A fine actor, Chiklis has been around for decades, but few actually thought he would beat Martin Sheen, Keifer Sutherland or the boys from HBO's "Six Feet Under." It's kind of refreshing, in truth. I kind of like it when the dark horse wins.

There weren't too many other surprises. The wonderful Allison Janney won again for her work on NBC's "The West Wing" as did John Spencer, and CBS' "Everybody Loves Raymond" kicked some serious butt with three big wins. Doris Roberts, Brad Garrett and Ray Romano all were honored for their work on "Raymond."

Stockard Channing had a banner evening, winning twice for her work on "The West Wing" and the made-for-TV movie, "The Matthew Shepard Story." You go, Stockard.

All in all, this year's Emmy presentation was a nice commemoration of exceptional work. Hollywood can now breathe a sigh of relief. The new season is in full swing, the holidays are approaching, and no one has to worry about cramming themselves into a size two Vera Wang dress again until after the new year.

Emmys have taken on a pseudo Academy Award flavor, complete with the arrival of stretch limousines, the rolling out of the red carpet and Joan Rivers and her daughter barking obnoxious drivel into the stars' faces.

Still, some of the finest work in Hollywood is done in television, so the Emmy Awards carry just as much weight in Tinseltown. Being nominated for this coveted award is as significant as being noticed when Oscar makes his appearance every spring.

Sunday's broadcast was interesting, to say the least, with several surprise wins. Hosted by Conan O'Brien, the evening was playful and shrewd, boasting a rather dry comic tone as opposed to sidesplitting laughter.

I'm a huge fan of O'Brien, so he can do little wrong in my book, but some critics have already said that they wished he had actually gone a bit more over the top. My response to that is that he doesn't need to. His humor is subtle and wry and he has never been one to thump us on the head with a joke. He's simply funny. And it's all done with a poker-straight face. I think he is a genius. But I digress.

Several eccentric guests and presenters included Ozzy Osbourne and his brood, and Oprah Winfrey was honored with being the first recipient of The Bob Hope Humanitarian Award. All in all, the show was well done. It didn't go on for eternity, and acceptance speeches, for the most part, were not cut short by that brutal, but unfortunately necessary, *get off the stage, now*, music.

Bachelor Auction

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the patient's physical and emotional struggle. To learn more about ECF, visit www.emmanuelcancer.org.

If cupid strikes his arrows correctly, the evening will not only be a success romantically, but the ECF, a tirelessly hardworking and generous organization, will have more funds to help others.

For more information, please call Vermeulen at (908) 322-4323, Extension No. 17.

Censoring Books

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the ALA's 100 Most Frequently Banned Books, with emphasis on those owned by the library.

"We don't believe in banning books, however, we are selective and try to buy the best that is being written," Bernstein said.

By Monday morning, many of the banned books that had been set out on a specially designated table on Saturday, September 21, had been charged out of Westfield Memorial Library.

"We want people to understand that the freedom to read is an important thing and something libraries fight for," said Barbara Thiele, Library Director.

In addition to Rowling, other authors whose work has been challenged in recent years includes Robert Cormier, Leslea Newman, Katherine Patterson, Judy Blume, Maya Angelou, Christopher Pike, Caroline Cooney, and Lois Lowry.

A few familiar banned and challenged titles are "Ulysses" by James Joyce, "Lysistrata" by Aristophanes, "Canterbury Tales" by Chaucer, Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," and several of Shakespeare's plays.

Dreyer of Westfield Puts Pieces Together in Museum Quilt Show

WESTFIELD — Whistler House Museum of Art in Lowell, Mass., revealed that Westfield artist Joan Dreyer had her work in "Art Quilts at the Whistler" at The Whistler House Museum of Art.

This juried, international exhibit showcased 32 art quilts representing artists from 15 states and three foreign countries chosen from 360 submissions.

Dreyer's piece, "Altered State," was displayed in the Parker Gallery. The piece includes hand-dyed and bleached fabrics and incorporates quilting as well as embroidery.

"While I may begin with a quick sketch or loosely drawn design, I often abandon it," stated Dreyer. "The process is the most important thing and being open to possibilities that happen spontaneously."

"The tragic events of 9/11 took place while I was working on this



"Altered State," Joan Dreyer, quilt. Suddenly, my perception of this piece changed — whenever I look at it, I see windows of the World Trade Center buildings being blown away," added Dreyer. "I see windows of the World Trade Center buildings blown away," concluded Dreyer. "The title reflects my own 'altered state' of emotions from when I first began this piece to when it was completed."

Scott Gimple's "Fillmore" on ABC

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female, solve the big crimes like spray-painting a locker or bathroom stall, or stealing teacher's exams before they are passed out.

At X Middle School, there is a mall rocket launching pad, said Gimple, one of the many imaginary vehicles used by the producer to stress the intensity of a seventh grader's life. He added that the school principal is also larger than life by assuming more of a mayoral role than that of the everyday school director.

In a market where television programming predominantly speaks to a Caucasian race, Gimple admitted that he did not intentionally choose to make Fillmore an African-American, but that "it was definitely a reflection of the culture I was watching as a kid," because he was intrigued by movies like *Lethal Weapon*, and the "Miami Vice," primetime television series.

"Watching this show has made me think more of diversity," said Gimple, noting that his own experience in Berkeley Heights, a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood, changed when his eyes were opened to the diversity of a college setting.

After attending the School of Cinema and Television at the University of Southern California, Gimple signed on as editor and writer with Matt Groening's Bongo Comics Group, a comic book publisher.

For Bongo Comics, Gimple served as contributing editor on "The Simpsons: A Complete Guide to Our Favorite Family" and editor of "The Simpsons Forever: A Complete Guide to Our Favorite Family...Continued."

Gimple is also responsible for segments in Disney's "One Saturday Morning," the award-winning animated series "Disney's Pepper Ann."

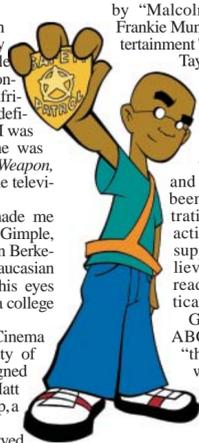
When he worked with Groening, Gimple said, "We were told to take the ball and run with it. But, Matt always said, 'Never, ever talk down to kids.' I definitely take that with me." He said that "Fillmore" "treats kids as being very smart and very perceptive human beings."

"Fillmore!" also includes voiceovers by "Malcolm in the Middle's" Frankie Muniz, Mary Hart of "Entertainment Tonight," and Holland Taylor of "The Practice."

Gimple currently has about four different projects in the works. He said that in early 2003, Bongo will release a black and white comic he has been working on, illustrating the quirky interactions of a superhero support group. He believes it will draw older readers with its sophisticated flavor.

Gimple reported that ABC informed him that "they are very happy" with the program. "Fillmore!" is also up 10 percent in its time slot as compared to last year's programming.

"Fillmore!" airs Saturday mornings on ABC as part of the "ABC Kids" line-up at 9 a.m. The program premiered on September 14.



Courtesy of Walt Disney Animation, 2002

Pen & Ink: Eating from TV

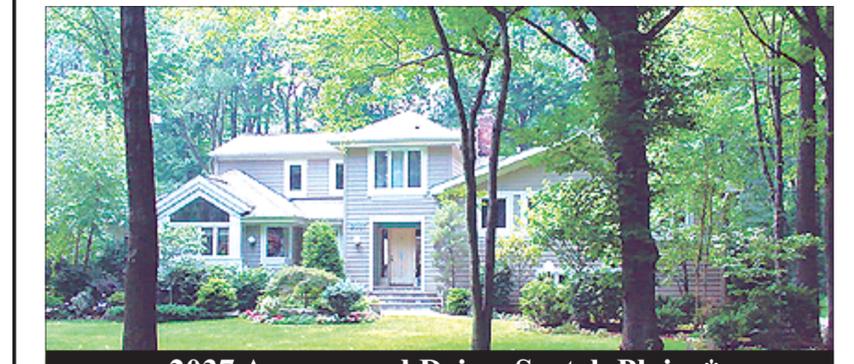
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wise not be familiar with. I learned about the delicious meat inside a conch shell, why some residents are called "conchs," what spices go into jerk chicken, and the value of baking a key lime pie with limes fresh from the Keys instead of my local A&P.

In my family, if you don't know how to make a good gravy, excommunication and strangement becomes a strong possibility. Family conventions are held and relatives try to convert you from a so-so girl to a goddess. It's a pretty intense. But, there is always something

new to learn, whether we want to admit it or not. The day I throw in the dish towel and claim that I know everything there is to know about culture, cooking and adventure is the day I decide to put a tablespoon of tarragon in the gravy.

Even if a grilled cheese sandwich poses a challenge to you, try watching one of these three cooking shows and you are sure to reexamine that stack of grill pans in your cabinet. You might even lose that phone number for Domino's and that Chinese place around the corner.

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