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TALES OF A DANCING QUEEN

Offbeat Aussies breathe life into Miramax's 'Muriel's Wedding'

LIGHTSCAMERAREACTION

STEPHEN BROWN Staff Writer

MURIEL'S WEDDING ★★★ (out of four stars)

Perhaps the music group ABBA said it best in the '70s with their loopy ode to basking in life's limelight: "You can dance/You can jive/Having the time of your life. Oh, see that girl/Watch that scene/Digging the Dancing Queen." If life could be as good as a bouncy pop song, surely we could find happiness.

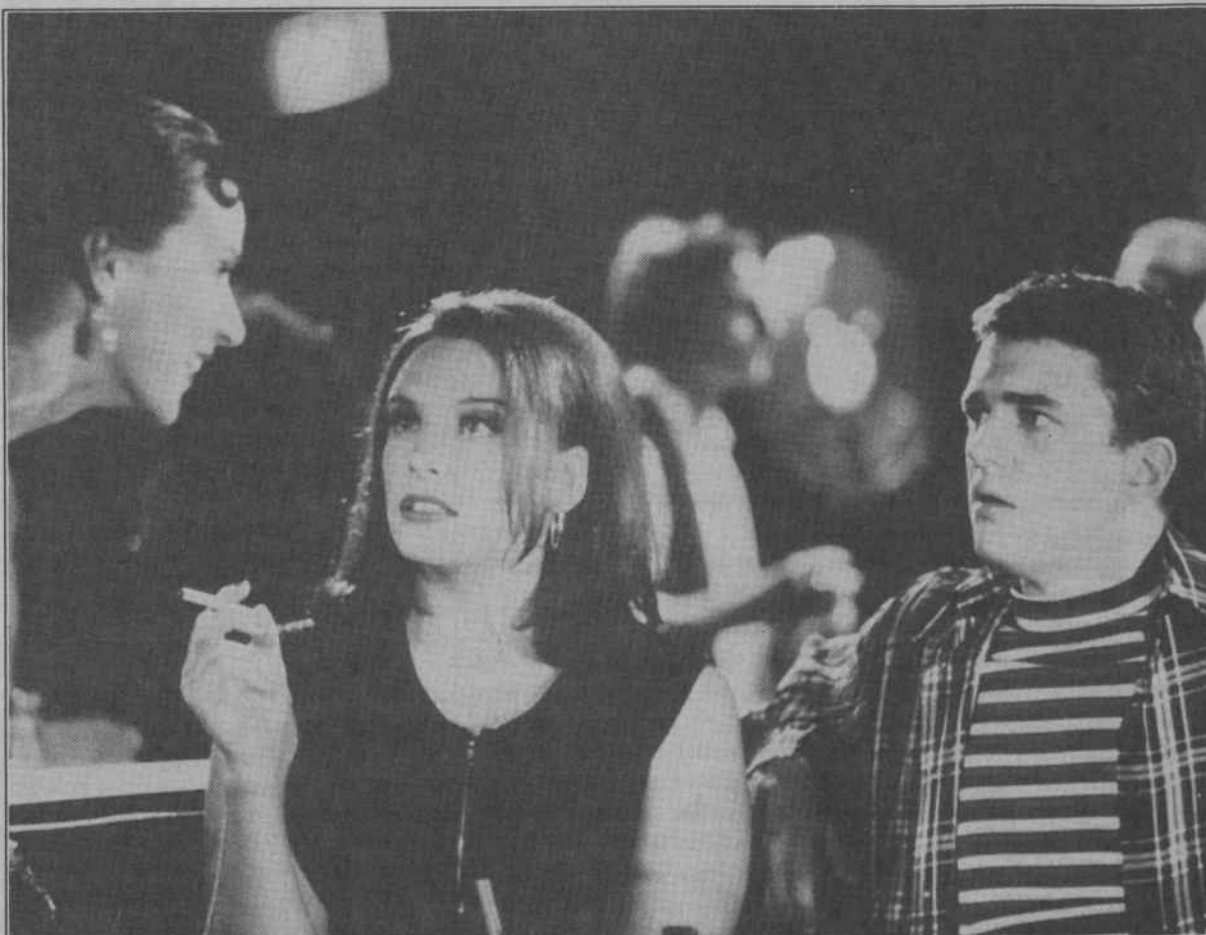
That's the premise of "Muriel's Wedding," a delightful Australian comedy about fulfilling your dreams, highlighted by splendid performances and a catchy pop hook of flamboyant situations and unpredictable events.

Muriel Heslop, played by Toni Collette, is a poor, plump, plain-looking loser from a town called Porpoise Spit. She has bad complexion, crooked teeth and an uncanny knack for compulsively lying. She has a secretarial degree, but she can't type and has not held a job in two years. She lives with her lazy couch potato family and is dubbed by her father as "the most useless" one of all. Her bedroom is a shrine to ABBA, and she dreams of one day being the "Dancing Queen" that the lyrics so gloriously extol.

The film begins at a wedding as women fiercely battle to catch the bride's bouquet. When Muriel, clad in leopard skin gear, grasps the flowers in her hands, the other women suggest that she throw them back in the air because nobody would marry her. Eventually police cart Muriel off from the wedding because a store detective recognizes the stolen goods she is wearing. Her dad bribes the police with cases of beer so they won't arrest his daughter for shoplifting, reinforcing again her complete lack of control over her life.

Muriel's friends are three vicious vixens, party girls with attitudes that make the "Heathers" look like archangels. When they tell Muriel they want nothing more to do with her and criticize her for being fat, wearing uncool clothes and listening to disco music, they cut straight at her heart. They embark on a vacation without Muriel, telling her they have a reputation to uphold.

Equipped with a blank check from



Rachel Griffith, Toni Collette and Matt Day star in 'Muriel's Wedding.'

Miramax Films



Pam Cross Publicity

Paul Sanchez, Steve Walters, Fred LeBlanc and John Thomas Griffith are Cowboy Mouth.

Cowboy Mouth back in town

BEN PILLOW Asst. Features Editor

Rockafellas' regular Cowboy Mouth will make its first appearance at Elbow Room tonight at 12:30, as the New Orleans quartet promotes their January release, "It Means Escape."

Made up of Fred LeBlanc on drums, Paul Sanchez on guitar, John Thomas Griffith on guitar and Steve Walters on bass, the band features the unique quality of three vocalists and songwriters. LeBlanc, Sanchez and Griffith all sing and write their own songs, with LeBlanc serving as front man most of the time.

"We have four distinct characters within the band and all think, act and look at life differently," Griffith said.

This conglomeration of ideas and styles makes Cowboy Mouth difficult to categorize, Griffith said.

Cowboy Mouth came out with their first album, "Word of Mouth,"

in 1993 and in 1994 with a live record, "Mouthing Off."

"We wanted to capture more of the feel of our live performances: explosive, emotional but still concentrating on the main part of any record, which is great songs," LeBlanc said.

The album was recorded in New Orleans at Daniel Lanois' studio, who is also U2's producer. The project took only two weeks to complete, a good thing considering the band tours about 300 days a year.

The band will tour this summer with Columbia's Hootie and The Blowfish. The band played with Hootie two months ago in Charleston at the Kingship Auditorium.

Griffith describes the band's live performances as intense and energetic, reminiscent of "early punk rock days."

And the end product, Griffith says, is pure fun.



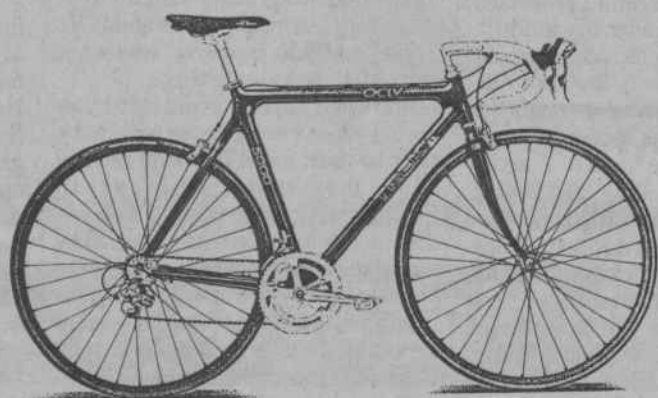
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