

'Providence' shows tender reality

BY ROB LINDSEY
GAMECOCK CRITIC

Cliches are born in strange ways. Out of nowhere, someone will simply proclaim that a certain action or story or performance is unoriginal because it is trite. Well, for something to become stereotypical it must, necessarily, start out as an original idea. Before it is trite, it is true.

But somewhere along the line, after countless imitators have diluted the original meaning, the term "cliche" comes into play, and all others who choose to delve into the same subject — no matter the quality of the endeavor — are dismissed as unoriginal.

"Outside Providence," a film likely to be shoved aside in just such a manner by critics, should instead be praised as a touching portrayal of adolescence that rings true through the layers of cliche that have been built up over the years by sub-par films of this genre.

"Providence" tells the story of Tim Dunphy, called "Dildo" by his father (Baldwin) and "Dunph" by his friends, as he grows up in a blue-collar town on the outskirts of Providence, R.I., in the '70s. He's a good kid who looks out for his wheelchair-bound younger brother and doesn't get into too much trouble until he is arrested for running into a parked police car while smoking marijuana.

But his father pulls some strings and gets the charges dropped on the condition that he complete high school at a prestigious prep school. While at the boarding school, he, of course, meets and starts dat-

ing the coolest girl at the neighboring girls' school, and he, of course, becomes the institutional bad boy. And Dunph, of course, comes out on top in the end. Sounds like a pretty standard formula, right?

Well, the players deliver such heartfelt performances, particularly Alec Baldwin as the tough-talking Archie Bunker type with a thick Northern accent and the best lines in the movie. Baldwin's career would come out of the toilet if he would only concentrate more of his efforts on character-driven films instead of the big-budget crap he's been in lately. His performance in "Providence" treads very close to the edge of originality, but

Baldwin has the sincerity and conviction not to fall into cliche. He treats Dunph with a firm hand, but always comes through when it counts, just as most of the good parents I know.

Surprisingly, "Providence's" warm and heartfelt script is written by the same crass comedic talents responsible for such films as "There's Something About Mary" and "Dumb and Dumber." Peter and Bobby Farrelly have toned down their usual brand of humor, losing the grotesque in favor of the clever. True, there are many drug references and a touch of physical comedy, but for the most part, the jokes remain in context, never entering the realm of the



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK
Amy Smart and Shawn Hatosy fall in love in Miramax' "Outside Providence."

surreal as they tend to do in their other films. Such a toned-down approach could be explained in two ways.

Either the Farrelly brothers are trying to treat this subject with a serious hand because of its autobiographical nature (the film is based Peter Farrelly's first novel), or the director, Michael Corrente, wouldn't let them go as crazy as they do on films they direct. In either instance, the humor works and seems sincere.

As for the main characters, Dunph's relationship with his father and with his girlfriend are both treated with an even hand and are true to the characters and to reality.

Kevin Bacon diversifies in latest film

BY SAMANTHA CRITCHELL
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Kevin Bacon is an accomplished actor who has worked with Oscar winners and top directors. He is also a dedicated family man with two children who sings and writes songs with his brother.

Yet when you hear his name, does the 1984 film "Footloose" still come to mind?

That's a typical reaction, said Bacon, who has mixed feelings about his breakthrough role as Ren McCormack, a city kid who moves to a small town where dancing has been outlawed. (One reviewer wrote: "Bacon's charisma sparks innocuous film.")

"I'd like to be better known for something that I've done in the last 15 years. It would have been nice if something had taken its place," he said during an interview at a Manhattan hotel. "But by the same token, I don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth. It was an important movie for me."

Since "Footloose," Bacon's two dozen film credits include "JFK," "A Few Good Men," "The River Wild" and "Apollo 13." He is most proud of "Murder in the First," a 1995 film that also starred Christian Slater, Gary Oldman and William H. Macy.

His new film is "Stir of Echoes," a psychological thriller that follows Bacon on a supernatural journey after he is hypnotized at a neighborhood party.

One thing that attracted Bacon to the role was director David Koepp's advice to view the part as a great character instead of a classic leading man.

"I think part of the reason I have not always been as successful as a leading man is that the characters just haven't been that well written," Bacon said. "A lot of times, people will focus more of their energy on bad guys or funny best friends, and the hero gets the short end of the stick in character development."

Unfortunately, Bacon said, he can't always see the flaws of a character or a story until it's too late.

"Seeing a picture for the first time is always a real shock. I try to, if I can, get in and see some dailies and cut footage just to see bits and pieces."

It is the period leading up to the re-

NOW PLAYING:

'In Too Deep'

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

From its grainy, unfocused opening sequence, it's clear that nothing about "In Too Deep" will be clear.

Not the characters — they fluctuate from flashes of raging sadism to tender charity.

Certainly not the story — it meanders from one violent scene to the next before arriving at its startling climax.

One thing's for sure: "In Too Deep" is an extremely raw, disturbing film that sometimes goes over the top in its brutality.

Omar Epps plays Jeff Cole, a cocky young narcotics officer for the Cincinnati Police Department. Jeff goes undercover to bring down a drug lord nicknamed God (L.L. Cool J). No cop has been able to penetrate God's operation, based in the projects, but Jeff is sure he can. After all, he grew up in the projects. Plus, he has boundless faith in his abilities.

In his undercover persona of J. Reid,

Jeff gets sucked into God's world. He hangs out with God's deputies, befriends them, becomes one of them. Soon he loses sight of the man he used to be and is torn between answering to his lieutenant (Stanley Tucci) and his new boss.

He also struggles to balance his police work with his other passion, a beautiful, sweet dancer named Myra (Nia Long) with whom he could find true happiness for the first time.

Everything in Jeff's world is a contradiction.

God dominates the projects through his drug cartel, yet he drops a ton of cash each year on a Thanksgiving dinner for poor people.

The drug dealers coldly engage in illegal, immoral activity, but many are married with children and they're steadfastly loyal to each other. Several of them attend the baptism of God's infant son, and one serves as the godfather. As he cradles his infant son, God tells his friends proudly, "He's gonna be something someday."

Despite these intriguing complexities, the story from screenwriters Paul Aaron and Michael Henry Brown

'The Muse'

BY HILLEL ITALIE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Like men who get drunk on grape juice thinking it's wine, filmmakers in Albert Brooks' "The Muse" are inspired by a diva who they believe is truly one of the Greek gods of creativity.

Thanks to this "Muse," played by Sharon Stone and conducting business like the most pampered of starlets, we have James Cameron's "Titanic," Rob Reiner's "The American President" and any number of Martin Scorsese movies. The Muse's worshippers arrive bearing trinkets from Tiffany and come away with advice they treasure like oracles. "Stay away from the water," she urges Cameron, desperate for a followup to his blockbuster movie.

That Cameron, Reiner and Scorsese all make cameos in "The Muse" is a sign of how Hollywood adores Brooks, the poet of yuppie neurosis, and how it adores making fun of it itself. Brooks is clearly happy to reciprocate.

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