

This 'Punch' is spiked with wit, humor

by Daniel J. Stasiewski
staff writer

**** out of ****

Describing any P.T. Anderson film as both bizarre and brilliant should never come as a surprise. He is, after all, the man who wrote the climactic frog-raining scene in "Magnolia."

However, using the word brilliant to describe an Adam Sandler movie isn't just surprising, it's almost unheard of. The Sandler/Anderson collaboration, "Punch-Drunk Love," is more than just brilliant. It's as funny as it is scary, as timid as it is edgy. It's a dizzying mesh of classic styles and a modern story. "Punch-Drunk Love" is as big an oxymoron as a brilliant Adam Sandler film ought to be, and I loved every moment of it.

Life is tough for Barry Egan (Sandler). The troubled small business owner is looking for anything to fill the void in his lonely life. His seven irksome sisters don't help, as their interference only sets off his explosive temper. Instead of working on his social skills, Barry concerns himself with collecting Healthy Choice pudding cups in order to take advantage of a loophole in its airline miles promotion.

Barry does recognize that he needs help. Instead of turning to a psychiatrist, Barry looks for support in the sultry voice of a phone sex operator. When the operator tries to scam Barry out of \$750, he refuses only to start an all-out war with the phone sex company owner (Philip Seymour Hoffman).



Adam Sandler, with Emily Watson, shows off his serious acting talent for the first time in "Punch Drunk Love."

Barry's life of pudding cup promotions and threatening phone sex operators gets more complicated when he finally finds that special someone in his sister's coworker, Lena (Emily Watson). Lena is a frequent traveler, which works great with his plan to collect thousands of airline miles from pudding. Now if he could just get the phone sex company off his back. Punch-drunk is the perfect way to describe your condition after walking out of this film. For an hour and a half, writer/director P.T. Anderson takes the audience through a world

that is peculiar in every way. The opening scene of a sudden, violent car crash followed by the mid-street drop-off of an old harmonium is as jarring as thousands of frogs falling from the sky. When Egan picks the harmonium out of the street, the reality of how utterly fantastic "Punch-Drunk Love" is just begins to take shape.

The characters in "Punch-Drunk Love" are a quirky bunch of misfits and outcasts. Take Barry, for example. Beside his pudding collection, phone sex therapy, and volatile temper, Barry hides complete

lack of self confidence behind a single blue suit because he "thought it would be nice to get dressed up to go to work." Of course he wears the same suit everyday, wherever he goes.

Barry's idiosyncrasies also help Sandler give a solid performance. No, it's not anything spectacular and it's nowhere near Oscar worthy, but as Barry, Sandler is able to try something new without completely abandoning the hot-blooded character he is known for. I won't compare Sandler's turn from slapstick to Jim Carrey's yet, but

if Sandler does have another movie like "Punch-Drunk" I might have to. Sandler's costar Watson is the perfect companion. As Lena, Watson is able to portray her character with the poise of a Hollywood starlet and still seem completely reluctant to do so. There's sweetness in her hesitation, and Lena becomes the most honest character because of it.

The characters, however fun, are not the film's biggest attribute. P.T. Anderson has directed a masterwork, here. "Punch-Drunk Love," even with its contemporary plot, finds a way to combine old, otherwise conflicting Hollywood film styles. The complete absurdity of a screwball comedy, the passion of an old-fashioned romance, and the sinister thrills of film noir are all present. With a shrill female voice repeatedly singing "He Loves Me" and an iris shot on Lena and Barry holding hands, all this film needs is a fast-motion sequence to throw silent film into the mix.

I'm convinced that the extraordinary Billy Wilder (director of "Some Like it Hot" and "Sunset Blvd.") would have loved this movie. It's zany and madcap, romantic, and incredibly dark. Not all at once, but repeatedly and appropriately. For Sandler this is a much-needed separation from his days as "Happy Gilmore." Actually, everyone needs a break from those days, and there's no better place to find it than in Anderson's "Punch-Drunk Love."

Five reasons why everybody should love Raymond



PHOTO FROM EVERYBODYLOVESRAY.COM

Even though we all love Ray Romano, he has not yet signed on for next year.

by Rachel Lyon
staff writer

When one hears about must-see TV comedy, one would assume "Friends," "Frasier," or even "Will and Grace." And those comedies deserve respect.

However, for the past seven years, CBS has worked up their own little "must see TV" Monday nights, anchored by one of the tube's hottest shows, "Everybody Loves Raymond," starring a slew of Emmy winners, including Ray Romano, Patricia Heaton, and Brad Garrett. The hit focuses on the Barone family, Ray, his wife, and the unfortunate situation of his parents living across the street.

It's true that "Ray" is not hyped the way NBC hypes its comedies, but quite simply, CBS doesn't have to. Raymond has found its audience and consistently finishes in the top five when the weekly Nielsen Ratings come out. So, if you haven't seen "Everybody Loves Raymond," here are five reasons why, you too, would love Raymond.

1) "Who is that, the devil?" asks Ray of his daughter's hand-drawn picture of Hell.

"No, it's you," she replies, matter-of-factly.

Yes, Ray certainly has his hands full of family life. But he'd rather not. The sports columnist husband would rather sit on the couch and watch the game than help clean up after the kids, talk to his wife, Debra, or go to church with the family.

However, Ray keeps audiences in stitches with a happy comedic medium of being funny, but not hilarious. His dry humor mixed with almost childish antics makes him different from his comedic rivals at NBC. In fact, "Everybody Loves

Raymond" is based on Ray Romano's real life. So some of the outrageous situations Ray Barone finds himself in can't be too far off from reality.

2) "Idiot!"

Ray's wife, Debra's term of endearment for her husband can be heard weekly, as he tries to cope with what she calls her "gothic-novel" type of life. Who could blame her? Her in-laws could almost be considered "live-in-laws." Besides Marie's less than sympathetic feelings toward her daughter in law, she views Debra (Patricia Heaton) as a messy housekeeper, awful cook, and less than nurturing mother. Plus Debra must deal with Ray's "hands-off" approach when it comes to household duties. She's got to take on the superwoman role as she battles her evil, intrusive in-laws, her unwilling husband, and the regular pressures of the modern homemaker. Unfortunately, she has yet to conquer all three. She may win a few battles, but overall, she's losing the war, and sometimes at the sacrifice of her sanity. However, she and Ray unite in the end, and the two are agreeable on the fact that their relationship is "relatively normal."

3) "I was born with this family. I'm stuck with them!"

Yes, family. Can't live with them, can live without them. At least Ray would agree. Ray's parents, Frank and Marie, played by Peter Boyle and Doris Roberts, call his house just as much of a home as their own...right across the street. And it's a wonder the 60-some couple haven't killed each other. They argue constantly over issues such as who invented the lawn. Then there's older brother Robert (Brad Garrett). Dear old, bumbling, pathetic Robert, also, for a time, living across the street with his parents. And Ray's older bro never lets him forget who the favorite is in the family. "Raymond. He's the center of attention; the center of affection; he gets the center chair at the table..." and so on.

4) "Everybody Loves Ray" Every night

If you haven't seen "Ray" prior to now, don't wait until Monday at 9 p.m. to see for yourself. WJET-24 reruns the show every weeknight at 7:00. If you haven't seen these episodes before, they're new to you.

5) Time May Be Running Out!

As of yet, Romano has not signed on for the next year of the sitcom. Yes, it seems so many sitcoms are threatening to pull the plug after this year, but when it comes to "Raymond" better safe than sorry. Tune in Monday nights at 9 p.m. on CBS before time if up.

The Code invades Edinboro on Saturday



PHOTO FROM THECODE.COM

The Code plays raw punk rock with political and social messages.

by Kevin Fallon
staff writer

The Code is one band that is not all talk.

The Code plays raw street punk, in the vein of Operation Ivy and Bad Religion, with a political and social message. But the band doesn't just sing about politics, it is active as well.

For example: last Saturday the Code played an anti-war benefit show and participated in protests in Washington D.C.

"We were right near the Vietnam Memorial with all 200,000 people," said singer Marc Clinger. "It was amazing. It was very peaceful. It's about showing we don't want violence as a means to an end. It was probably one of the greatest things I've ever been a part of in my life."

The Code's debut CD, "Alert Aware Involved," showcases the band's socially conscience message though fast paced bare-bones punk rock. Songs such as "Riot" and "John Doe" show the band's political side; something the band thinks has been lacking in punk rock.

"We as people need to work together more," said Clinger. "There are so many things in this world that are (messed) up that we pass off. We need to be more alert, aware, and involved about the things that go on around us that rule our lives."

"The greatest thing about punk rock is it's about doing your own thing. I

believe the social and political aspects of punk have been waning in the past decade. But there is a new generation of kids becoming more aware of life around them."

Clinger, an Erie native, moved to Pittsburgh and formed the Code after a few failed attempts at bands in Erie. The band soon signed to A.F. records, which is run by members of Anti-Flag. Since then the band has played shows with bands such as Good Riddance as well as staying active in the punk scene.

The Code will tour with Anti-Flag and the Bouncing Souls this winter. But first, the Code will play the Hangout in Edinboro on Saturday, along with Common Rider, featuring members of Operation Ivy and Screaming Whoresel, some of the Code's influences and idols.

"One thing that I learned from Erie, especially the hardcore scene, was it is all about doing to for yourself," said Clinger. "It's funny to come back to a town where you grew up and had no success in with bands and come back and there's 300 kids singing along to your lyrics. It really inspires me whenever I come back."

The band hopes to make more people alert, aware, and involved by playing shows and pushing their punk ideals. After all, as Op Ivy said, "There ain't nothing wrong with another unity song."