

'Carol' predictable but beautiful

By TOM KLEMICK
STAFF WRITER
GTK5002@PSU.EDU

It's hard to believe, but Christmas is only a few weeks away and there's plenty that needs to be done. There's putting up the tree, hanging the lights, finishing the last minute shopping and going to see Disney's "A Christmas Carol," directed by Robert Zemeckis. That last one wasn't a necessity in past holiday seasons but this year it's a must. Charles Dickens' classic never looked as visually stunning as it does now in 3-D.

The story is timeless but it's also the weakest part of the film. Not because of the writing but because everyone knows how it ends. It is as much a part of Christmas tradition as Nat King Cole, a Red Ryder BB gun, George Bailey and Charlie Brown. Ebenezer Scrooge, played by Jim Carrey, is one of the richest and meanest men in all of London town. He keeps Christmas in his own way. That is, he doesn't keep it at all. On Christmas Eve, he is haunted by the ghost of his dead partner,

Jacob Marley, and told that he will be visited by three spirits: the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future. You know the rest.

What you won't be familiar with is the film's pace. Scenes of our protagonist flying above rooftops and through the narrow alleys of London are prevalent. A shrunken Scrooge being chased through the streets by a shadowy carriage driver and black horses seems out of place. These moments would be more appropriate in a Harry Potter film than "A Christmas Carol."

But the filmmakers have to be commended for the movie's inventiveness. Disney's version is fast-paced and imaginative. Animation allows for more creative freedom in any genre, but especially more so in a fantasy. In a story about spirits and ghostly visions, almost anything goes. There have been numerous film adaptations of Dickens' tale produced for the big screen. What's the point of making a word-for-word remake of a story that's been told time and again?

Zemeckis is becoming a master of 3-D, this being another of

his films, like "Beowulf" and "The Polar Express," shot using the process. The performance-capture animation is used not as a gimmick but as an enhancement to the film. London comes to life, looking eerie and imposing at night and lively and festive during the day. There are some truly beautiful outdoor scenes that that would make even Thomas Kinkadee jealous; a light snowfall on a peaceful Christmas Eve's night, colorful, twinkling lights in every shop window in town. These shots would make for a stunning Christmas card. Others scenes are dark and foreboding; a shadowy Ghost of Christmas Future pointing his skeletal finger in our direction, a nervous Scrooge peeking his long, beak-like nose through his bed curtains. This movie must be seen in 3-D.

Carrey does a fine job playing four roles: Scrooge and all three Christmas ghosts. He makes these characters real and interesting, not playing them over the top for laughs. Carrey's voice, like Scrooge's character himself, progresses from nasty to nervous to remorseful and finally to ecstatic.

Gary Oldman also succeeds in playing multiple roles as Bob Cratchit, Marley and Tiny Tim. Some of the best praise you can give the cast of an animated film is that you don't waste your time thinking about the actors' voices because you're too busy enjoying the movie. This is the case in "A Christmas Carol."

The film remains fairly true to its source material. The story is dark. The ultimate payoff comes because of Scrooge's transformation. But in order to share in Scrooge's jubilation, we have to share in his fear and regret as well. The film is advertised as a family movie and while its PG rating is pretty accurate, there are some rather frightening moments. Watching Marley tie the cloth around his chin too tight and the Ghost of Christmas Past playfully bobbing his flame of a head is amusing. But there is also a scene in which the Ghost of Christmas Present basically dies, wasting away from jolly spirit to pale skeleton and finally to dust in the wind. Another finds Scrooge dangling high above his own coffin, clinging to a tree root for

dear life. If children are going to see the film, parents really should accompany them.

The basic, human theme of Dickens' story is redemption in the face of hopelessness. Zemeckis, Carrey and the other filmmakers don't forget this. "Scrooge," the 1951 classic starring Alistair Sim, is an even darker and more faithful version of "A Christmas Carol" and it remains the best film version. Carrey can't match Sim, but the movie doesn't need him to. Disney's version plays to a wider audience due to its mix of serious and lighthearted themes. Think George C. Scott meets the Muppets. The movie is up and down at times but you can't fault the filmmakers for taking a different approach to a story engrained in our popular culture. To see Scrooge throw away happiness with both hands and redeem himself on the most magical night of the year is inspirational and never gets old. "It was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well if any man alive possessed the knowledge." Disney's not too bad at it either.

Mobile strip club parked after pressure

By OSKAR GARCIA
Associated Press Writer

Live strippers on the back of a truck is too much — even for Sin City.

A Las Vegas strip club has agreed to stop an advertising promotion that involved hauling bikini-clad exotic dancers around in a truck with clear plastic sides.

Larry Beard, marketing director of Deja Vu Showgirls, said Friday that he's taking his lawyer's advice and parking the truck.

"We're going to respect the opinion of the folks that are against it," Beard told The Associated Press. "We're going to be good citizens and take it off the street."

Beard had told the AP earlier this week that he was prepared to fight county leaders and others who thought the moving truck promotion was unseemly or unsafe.

"The girls are wearing more than the girls at the swimming

pool wear," Beard said this week. "Even though they're not stripping and taking their clothes off I think people are offended because of the idea that they do."

The truck rolled for 13 nights along the Las Vegas Strip from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m., trying to lure customers to the club. Three sides had windows that weren't tinted, offering views of the strippers dancing around a stripper pole.

The tactic worked, with business booming since the truck started going out, Beard said.

"We even have cars and limos follow us to the club," Beard said this week.

The dancers were allowed to perform in the truck because it was classified as a vehicle for hire, which let the dancers ride in the back without seat belts, Beard said.

Public outrage over the truck grew as pictures and videos of the truck surfaced on the Internet and a county commissioner in Las Vegas vowed to shut it down.

Clark County Commissioner Steve Sisolak said he got calls

from citizens who hated it and others who liked it, but he considered the truck a safety problem.

"It's clearly a distraction," Sisolak told the AP. "Somebody's going to turn their head to look at some girl flipping upside-down and spinning on a pole, and take their eyes off the road and could swerve and pop up the sidewalk and plow into a bunch of tourists that are walking along."

Sisolak said he plans to try to close a loophole in local laws regulating mobile billboards.

Regulations prohibit advertising vehicles that use animation or flashing lights, and Sisolak said he would try to prevent live entertainers from being used, too.

Meanwhile, he's happy the club owners decided to park the truck.

"Could they have won in court? That would have been a long, costly, time-exhaustive battle," Sisolak said. "They clearly got a lot of publicity as it stands, which I'm sure made them happy."

A 'Modern' source for wit and sarcasm

By ALLISON MILLS
STAFF WRITER
MXA932@PSU.EDU

ABC finally developed a solid comedy series, airing Wednesdays at 9 o'clock. "Modern Family" is a family sitcom with a stylized mocking of reality—think "Arrested Development" plus "The Office." Subtle, sarcastic humor with a hint of comical exaggeration comprises this new social gem of a show.

"Modern Family" follows three families through their daily lives, capturing priceless interactions with their family. The first family in this series is Jay and Gloria, who had her son, Manny, from a previous marriage. Jay is a blunt older man with children Gloria's age. Gloria is a saucy, dramatic Colombian, and Manny is an adult-like child.

The second family is Phil and Claire's family. Claire is Jay's

daughter. Phil is a slightly tone-downed Michael Scott character. He thinks he's the cool parent, and Claire is a practical, no-nonsense mother of three. Her biting humor directs our attention to her family's shortcomings, like their son. They worry he won't be good at anything.

The third family is Jay's son and Claire's brother, Mitchell and his husband, Cameron. They recently adopted a baby girl together. Mitchell is the husband least out of the closet, and Cameron is flamboyant and fabulous. As Cameron claimed, "Any monkey can shoot a home movie. I pride myself on shooting home films."

"Modern Family" is shot with shallow depth of field and using mobile framing. It gives the series a realistic feeling without ever reaching the low quality of reality television. The framing is quick and efficient, and the mise-en-scene is reminiscent of "Arrested Development."