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Reviewer: 'Punchline' suffers disjointed story

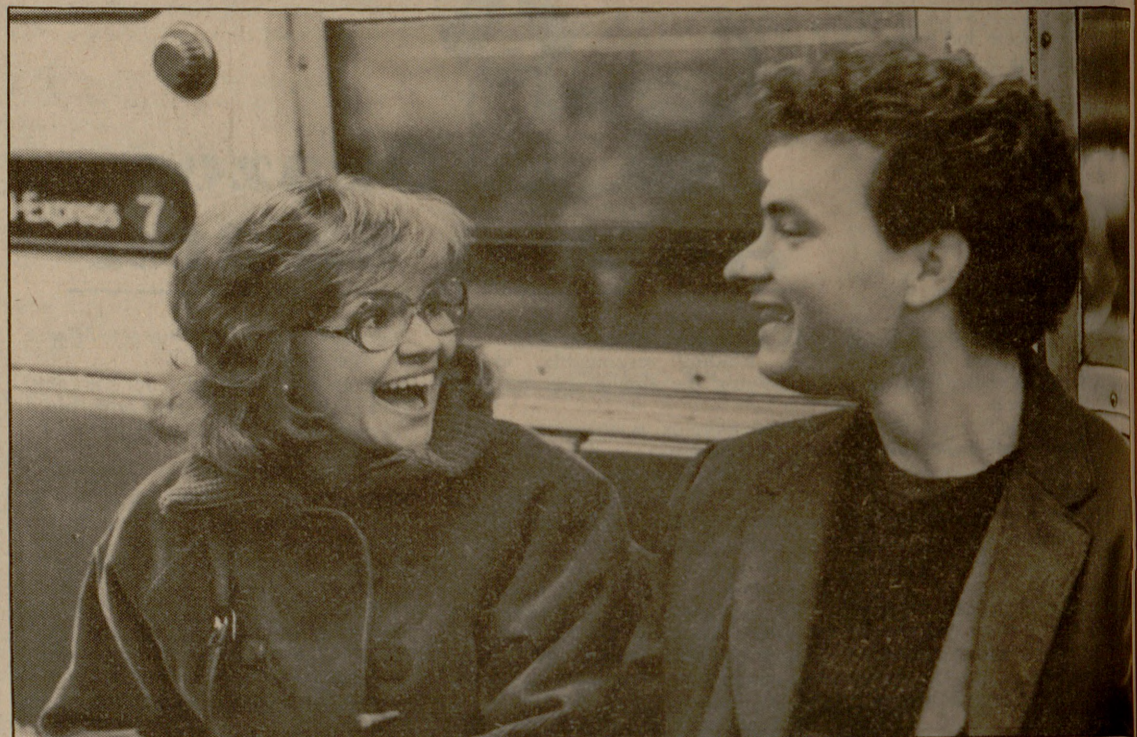


Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries

Lilah Krystick (Sally Field) and Steven Gold (Tom Hanks) are aspiring comics in the film "Punchline."

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By Shane Hall
Staff Writer

"Punchline" is a comedy/drama that does not fully succeed as either. The film, about two struggling nightclub comics, opens today at the Plaza Three Theater in College Station. While it boasts some great performances, it also suffers from a disjointed story.

Review

Tom Hanks plays Steven Gold, a failed medical student who works nights as a stand-up comic at the Gas Station, a New York nightclub.

Sally Field plays Lilah Krystick, a New Jersey housewife and mother of three who performs at the same club and almost never gets a laugh. At the beginning of the film, she's so desperate to succeed that she meets with a joke dealer (played by Paul Mazursky) to buy 25 jokes for \$500.

What's more, Lilah's frequent performances at the club do not thrill her brutish, insurance salesman husband (John Goodman), who would rather have his wife at home cooking and taking care of the kids.

Steven soon takes Lilah under his wing to teach her a few things about

making people laugh.

All of this makes for what could have been a good human comedy until writer/director David Seltzer tries to do too many things with his script.

The story lacks a solid unification. For much of the film, the stories of Steven and Lilah seem like two different movies.

The conflict of Field's character forms the basis for most of the film's dramatic content.

Her husband, John, angry at his wife's never being home at night or having dinner ready when he comes home, would just as soon see her abandon her dream of making people laugh to be with him and the kids. As he tells her, she might someday remember the people who love you even when you're not funny. But when Lilah gets her first laugh, she becomes more determined to succeed and John becomes more resistant.

Steven, a talented comedian constantly hanging onto a hot shot talent scout (Kim Greist) in an effort to be discovered, is trying to make enough money to pay his roommate the back rent he owes so he can get back into his apartment.

For some unknown reason, a love interest between Steven and Lilah is suggested out of the blue, but it never devel-

ops and is ultimately tossed out of window.

Not until the film's end do the different stories actually come together. After Lilah enters a talent contest awarding the winner a spot on a Johnny Carson show, her husband makes a complete 180 degree change in attitude and decides to go see his wife perform. At the end, he discovers the love she did.

The ending demonstrates why "Punchline" is inappropriately named. Not only is it a punchline, you get an overly sentimental, "and they lived happily ever after" scene between Lilah and Steven for what happens to Steven, we do not wonder.

Tom Hanks is hysterical as Steven Gold, delivering plenty of quick one-liners during his scenes. As his character says, "I'm Mr. Comedy."

Sally Field gives a convincing dramatic performance as Lilah. Unfortunately, her funny scenes in the film suggest that her character could have been even more interesting had Steven allowed a more comic element into his story. And again, the sappy ending suggested love interest between the characters seems unnecessary.

To sum it all up, if you're looking for a punchline, you won't find it here.

Former official: Our nation still racially divided society

AUSTIN (AP) — The former federal official who personally confronted then-Alabama Gov. George Wallace in one of the most dramatic civil rights showdowns during the 1960s said Thursday the United States remains racially separate and unequal.

Former U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach said anti-discrimination laws of the 1960s have helped some, but the nation continues to march toward a racially divided society.

"If we really open our eyes, we've learned that the problems today are worse than they were 20 years ago," Katzenbach said in a speech that kicked off a two-day seminar on urban problems being held at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

He said the country has moved backward since 1968 when a presidential panel, the Kerner Commission, reported a national crisis in race relations. "We have indeed moved further toward those two societies; black and white, separate and unequal."

Katzenbach said the migration of affluent and middle class whites from the cities to the suburbs, followed by the flight of

business, has hurt minorities trying to rise from the ghetto.

He said the lack of job and educational opportunities, violence and crime in the inner cities.

"I hope that all of you are prepared to face and accept the fact that our urban problems, and their resolution, are inescapably tied to the problems of race," Katzenbach said. "The most whites refuse to tie the two problems together, and blacks are too eager to exploit it."

Deputy attorney general, Katzenbach confronted Gov. Wallace on the steps of the University of Alabama.

Katzenbach, enforcing a federal court desegregation order, asked Wallace to step aside, saying, "From the outside, we know, all of us have known that the final chapter of this film will be the admission of these students."

After repeated requests by Katzenbach and as federal National Guard troops stood on the campus, Wallace stepped aside and the students were enrolled.

On Wednesday, Katzenbach said current racial problems must be addressed. "If this country does not face up to the urban and race problem, we will in the not to distant future see our leadership in the world," he said.

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