

'Dutch' certainly no treat; wastes time, money and talent

By Julia E.S. Spencer

"Dutch" is the latest comedy from John Hughes, the producer/writer/director responsible for the runaway success of "Home Alone," currently the third highest-grossing film of all time, now at \$268 million and counting. In this business, however, you can only rest on your laurels so long before you're expected to come up with the goods again.

Movie Review

So far this year, Hughes and Co. just ain't cuttin' it. "Career Opportunities" was awful, "Only the Lonely" was a waste of talent, and both were extremely disappointing financially. "Dutch" isn't going to be the answer to moviegoers' or investors' prayers either, I'm afraid.

Even if it seems partly recycled from "Planes, Trains and Automobiles," the premise, if not totally original, is clever enough: Dutch (Ed O'Neill), an average, working-class joe, volunteers to drive his girlfriend's snobbish, extremely spoiled son Doyle (Ethan Randall) home from his Atlanta prep school for Thanksgiving, and though they initially drive each other crazy, the two eventually develop an understanding and even a liking for each other.

Trouble is, the film fails to convince me that such a speedy reversal of sentiment is possible. You see, this kid isn't merely a pain or a nuisance, he's a psychopathic menace to society, a 13-year-old holy terror with a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do who would have even Mother Teresa in fits.

Angry because his dad (Christopher McDonald) has canceled their holiday plans and left on an overseas business trip, he takes it out on Dutch, kicking him, punching him, and assaulting him with a



Spoiled, rich Doyle (Ethan Randall) and his mother's blue-collar boyfriend Dutch (Ed O'Neill) try to thumb a ride home in "Dutch."

golf club and a pellet gun before the poor guy can say a word. Most people would have given up right there, but not Dutch. Determined to succeed because he cares for the boy's mother (JoBeth Williams), he hog ties the kid, packs him into the car, and sets off for Chicago.

Despite Dutch's efforts to be jocular and entertaining—he buys fireworks and risque playing cards to amuse the boy—his patience is rewarded with insults and dirty tricks. Fed up after Doyle puts a lit cigar in his lap while he's driving. He

leaves the surprised kid on the snowy highway, saying, "I'll meet you down the road at the motel."

But wait, there's more. When Doyle finally shows up at the motel, he doesn't just sheepishly slink into bed, he gets the keys to the Lincoln and totals it in an accident with an 18 wheeler. Even this, and the fact that he could have killed someone beside his worthless self doesn't faze him.

Dutch seems to have taken leave of his senses as well. Instead of dragging the

brat off to the juvenile authorities and letting him cool his heels in a holding cell for the night, he makes excuses for Doyle to the police and gets him off the hook.

The next morning, the best punishment he can think of involves hitchhiking back to Chicago together in sub-zero temperatures. This is tough love? It's certainly a strange kind of blue-collar parenting. In a Spike Lee movie, the kid would have been dogmeat in the first reel. But this is a John Hughes movie, where incorrigible souls have a funny way of

succumbing to cornball sentiment just in time for the holidays—and the moralistic ending.

In this movie the touching moment of reconciliation comes not when Doyle apologizes on his knees for being so rotten, and begs for forgiveness, but when he admits he treated a larcenous prostitute better than Dutch because he was "horny." Awww, where's the Kleenex, I think I'm going to cry now.

Cinematographer Charles Minsky's stunning visuals—fireworks reflected in the car windows and lovely aerial shots of fall color and winter landscapes—weren't enough to distract me from the weaknesses in the story and very un-funny script.

Director Peter Faiman said he held off directing again after "Crocodile Dundee" until he read Hughes' script for "Dutch," impressed with its "priceless dialogue." For this he waits five years? All I can say to that is I'm glad I didn't have to pay to hear it, because the maybe two or three decent lines are not worth the price of admission. Most of the dialogue is quite vulgar, extremely awkward, amateurish, and terribly unrealistic. The creaky script sticks with Hughes' tried-and-true formula, and practically sets out flares to mark the next Plot Development or Big Moment.

The characters, who are so obnoxious that five minutes with them is a punishment, let alone 90, are also inconsistent. The supposedly big-hearted Dutch spends the whole trip lecturing Doyle on how people who work for their money are just as good if not better than those who merely inherit it. So why doesn't his working-class generosity extend to the poor black family who drives them home from the shelter where they all spent the night? I guess offering to find the man a job is one thing, but God forbid Dutch should invite the family into his palatial home for dinner.

If this kind of waste of time, money and talent is what we can expect from Hughes in the future, I think we'd all be better off staying "home alone."

'Les Miserables' opens at Casa Manana

by Timm Doolen

"Les Miserables" (translated as "The Miserable Ones") is an ironic name for such a wonderfully beautiful musical that gets the treatment it deserves in Fort Worth this week.

Theater Review

"Les Mis" is the kind of musical that cannot be done properly as a local production—it deserves a large budget and a top-notch cast that can only be found on Broadway. The elaborate sets and detailed period costumes all add up to big bucks, and consequently a large ticket cost.

But the ticket price (\$20-\$30) and the travel (three hours to the Tarrant County Convention Center) for this Broadway production is worth every penny and mile of it.

The story of this play, which has now almost achieved classic status, is richly complex, based on the novel of the same name by Victor Hugo. In fact it is so complex that I could not even attempt to try to explain it all in this space.

But briefly, it is about the life of a good-hearted man, Jean Valjean, who was imprisoned in France in the early 1800s for stealing a loaf of bread for his sister's starving child. Though he is eventually freed, he can never escape his past or his arch nemesis—Javert, a prison guard and later police chief.

Much later Valjean gets caught up in the revolutionary dreams of a handful of French students in Paris. The students want to overthrow the aristocracy and give more to the poor, so they build a huge barricade in the streets of Paris and prepare to lay down their lives for their cause.

Valjean joins them, and the barricade in the streets serves as a metaphor for the barricades he has built around himself in



his own life.

Of course there's much more to the story than I have outlined, and that story is perfectly depicted in the songs of the lead players—especially Brian Lynch as Valjean and David Jordan as Javert.

The voices of the lead singers will keep you entranced for every second of the three hours of performances.

Highlights are the solos by Lisa Vroman and Candese

Marchese as Fantine and Eponine, respectively. And Javert's poetic justice steals the serious moments while the innkeeper Thénardier and his wife

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Soviet Sister University

Russian students give first impressions of Texas A&M

By Holly Becka

Eight Soviet students from Kazan State University, Texas A&M's sister school, visited campus Wednesday as part of a whirlwind tour of the heart of Texas.

All of the students were born and raised in Kazan, in the Russian Republic nestled near the Volga River. Many of the Soviets are first-time visitors to the United States, so their first glimpses into American life were unique.

Azat Farukshin, 22, says one of the first things he noticed about Texas were its good roads. In fact, he spent part of the day driving his American host's car.

"It was like driving on a table, it's so easy to drive here," Farukshin says.

According to many of the Soviet guests, the paved roads in the Soviet Union have a lot of potholes and people seemingly drive without any rhyme or reason because traffic signs are practically nonexistent.

Another thing the students noticed was the humidity, which they did not like—just like us those of us who are tortured during

Kirill Gorovadski had a rather surprising response when asked what he would like to do while he was visiting the United States.

"I would like to pilot a fighter," he responded sincerely. But more on the realistic level, Gorovadski said he wanted to go shopping.

The Russians admitted to being aware of stereotypes of Americans, which they say have changed somewhat from the dark, evil, meddling image.

"The new stereotype is all Americans are rich and happy. America is a paradise, all Americans work hard and have good jobs. But of course, we realize that is not true," Smirnova says, smiling.

"Another view is that Americans are only interested in their own business—they're only interested in their own families," says Amil Gataullin. "It's a view that Americans have no interest in politics or information from abroad. But by our visit, we are destroying the stereotypes. We now realize this is not true."

"That's right," says Gorovadski. "We have information from our hosts and we watched

"In Russia, a smile means you are really happy or really friendly because in Russia there is more anger than friendliness, so a smile is more honest there."

— Inessa Smirnova, Russian student

muggy Texas summers.

Inessa Smirnova, on her second visit to the United States, says one of her first impressions of America was the friendliness and apparent happiness of its citizens.

"On my second visit, now I realize your smile can mean nothing—it's not bad, just two ways of thinking and different behavior," she says. "In Russia, a smile means you are really happy or really friendly because in Russia there is more anger than friendliness, so a smile is more honest there."

CNN all night long."

About 12 A&M students are playing host to the Soviets during their two-week visit, which includes trips to Dallas-Fort Worth and Six Flags, Galveston, Houston and NASA, and various local sites. A benefit concert is scheduled for 8 p.m. Tuesday at AnNam Tea House. Money raised will help defray costs for visiting here.

Besides that, the Soviet students will live like any other A&M

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