

REEL CRITIQUE

**"50 First Dates"
Columbia TriStar Movies
Starring Adam Sandler, Drew
Barrymore and Sean Astin**



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA TRISTAR

Drew Barrymore (left) plays Lucy, who suffers from short-term memory loss as the result of a car accident. Her boyfriend Henry (Adam Sandler, left) relies on a scrapbook and other memorabilia to make Lucy fall in love with him on a daily basis.

of "The Wedding Singer" by combining Sandler and Barrymore again in a chemistry that doesn't work this time. Attempting to merge sensitivity and comedy is an admirable task, but this film falls short of its intentions. Some characters evoke a laugh or two here and there, such as Astin, who plays Lucy's younger, lisping brother Doug, or Rob Schneider, as the native Hawaiian and professional loafer Ula, who smokes joints when he isn't insulting his wife. But many punchlines fall flat — if the audience can recognize the punchlines at all.

Hawaii may be a typical setting for a tropical fantasy love story, but an island where short-term memory loss is a minor hurdle to a relationship and beautiful women fawn over Sandler with an insatiable sexual appetite is a fantasy land indeed. Note to females vacationing in Hawaii: Don't drink the water.

The only actor emerging from this movie unscathed is Barrymore, who maintains a believable sincerity and lovability as Lucy amidst horrible acting by her costars. The soundtrack, featuring mostly covers with some reggae tunes for good measure, will appeal to almost any music fan and sets the scene for Hawaii well.

"50 First Dates" suffers from split personality disorder: One minute it's a Farrelly Brothers low-brow comedy, complete with a vomiting walrus; the next, it asks for the audience's sympathy as Henry and Lucy's family observe memory-loss patients on a visit to a clinic for the brain-damaged. The scene re-enacting the car crash that caused Lucy's head injury is meant to be serious, but a slow-motion shot of a pineapple floating through the air interrupts the situation's gravity. Also, the memory-loss patient "10-Second Tom," who can't even get through a series of personal introductions without having to start over, is more pitiful than humorous.

Scenes of Lucy in emotional turmoil after learning of her terrible condition don't flow among walrus genitalia jokes. Even director Peter Segal seems aware that "50 First Dates" script doesn't have much going for it, judging by the abundance of animal reaction shots — a signature of desperate comedy.

Aside from the noteworthy soundtrack, "50 First Dates" is disappointing in "The Wedding Singer's" shadow. Although it could be argued that getting to see Rob Schneider clobbered with a baseball bat is worth the movie ticket price alone, Sandler fans seeking laughs will be better off at home watching their VHS tape of "Billy Madison."

— Julie Bone

Let's pretend this movie was never made.

Adam Sandler's comic reputation as a sweet goofball would still be intact, Sean Astin's namesake would still evoke warm images of Rudy Ruettiger and hobbits and Rob Schneider wouldn't be richer after profiting from native Hawaiian stereotypes.

Instead, Sandler, Drew Barrymore and Astin will have to recover from massive injuries to acting credibility due to "50 First Dates."

Sandler plays Henry Roth, a veterinarian at a sea animal water park in Hawaii who heals penguins and walruses by day and beds gorgeous vacationing tourists by night. Commitment-phobic, Henry has always relied on the tourists' short stays to the island to avoid the burden of a relationship. Just when he begins to tire of the player lifestyle, he sees the lovely Lucy (Barrymore) playing with her food while he eats breakfast at a local diner and it's instant attraction.

The two hit it off. After Lucy coldly rejects his come-ons the next time they meet, Roth is informed by the community that his love interest suffers from short-term memory loss caused by a car accident. Roth must impress her each day and strives to make a personal imprint on her memory, which fades each night. She eventually depends upon Roth, along with her scrapbooking skills, to re-teach her about her life after the injury and to make her fall in love with him on a daily basis.

With a plot reminiscent of "Groundhog Day," "50 First Dates" tries to repeat the success

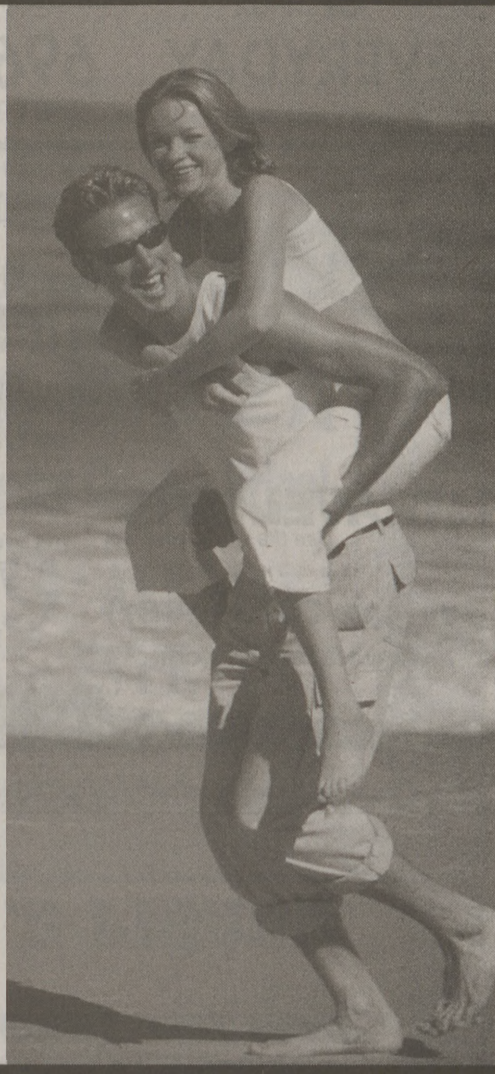
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