

How 'Mo Can You Go?: "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry"

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 25 July 2007 02:35



I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU CHUCK & LARRY

Movies released by Adam Sandler's Happy Madison production company have always been easily described in a sentence. With *I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry*, we finally have one that can be described in a *title*

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What can we assume about Sandler's latest without even seeing frame one of the film? Well, it'll obviously be about two guys who end up getting hitched, and we can be pretty sure they'll be ultra-macho guys, too, as "Chuck" and "Larry" are about the butchest monikers out there. (Seriously, try the title with any other male names. It sounds a little gayer now, doesn't it?)

Assuming this, we can imagine that much, if not all, of the humor will stem from a series of gay-panic gags - the guys having to fake intimacy while suppressing their urge to vomit, and all that. But we also know that, in these sensitive times, the filmmakers won't want to risk giving too much offense, so the homophobic jokes will likely be accompanied by sentimental scenes in which Chuck and Larry learn that, despite their prejudices, Gays Are People, Too.

All of these assumptions turn out to be correct, and that last consideration turns out to have been especially shrewd; in a widely publicized piece of promotion, a representative from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation has given the movie a big thumb's-up. (As an added benediction, Richard Chamberlain and Lance Bass make cameo appearances.) Having seen the film, I can't say I'm surprised by the lack of outrage. *Chuck & Larry* cracks numerous unpleasant jokes about gays, but is just as hateful toward women, blacks, Asians, the obese ... anyone, in short, that isn't Adam Sandler, or one of his straight, male, Caucasian disciples. Director Dennis Dugan's movie isn't offensive to a gay audience so much as it's offensive to a *thinking* audience.

I never thought I'd miss the days of Sandler's, ahem, "mentally challenged" portrayals in *Billy*

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Madison

and

The Waterboy

, but he's so much worse when playing "regular Joe"; Sandler is the only actor/producer I can think of who miscasts himself with such spectacular consistency. Ever since the actor began seeing himself as a viable romantic lead, his performances have become more and more senseless, as Sandler's stand-up-comic stylization - his reflexive need to make fun of anyone and anything around him - prevents him from ever revealing a soul. (When, here, Jessica Biel fawns over Chuck's "sweet, sensitive eyes," you have no idea what she's talking about, as Sandler has meant, judgmental eyes.)



But not only does Sandler not take anything the least bit seriously, his movies don't, either. Honestly, what is anyone with half a brain supposed to do with scenes such as the one that finds Larry (Kevin James) waking up from his first night spent with Chuck in his bed, only to discover his hulking, mannish housekeeper nestled between them? (The movie implies that Chuck and this beast had rousing sex, and used Larry as an accessory, while Larry slept.) Or the scene that finds Chuck's Lothario hounded by twin hotties who intend to prove their devotion to him by making out with each other? Or the scenes in which Biel's character begs Chuck to feel her breasts, and to instruct her on seduction techniques? (Poor Jessica Biel joins a roster of Sandler love interests that includes Poor Drew Barrymore in *50 First Dates* and Poor Kate Beckinsale in *Click*.)

And how are we to reconcile these and other less misogynist, equally offensive sequences, such as *Chuck & Larry's* didactic paeon to the heroism of New York firefighters and, in a direct quote, "the great Rudy Giuliani"? (The movie boasts an unseemly strain of 9/11-inspired emotional blackmail.) How are we to take the film's legitimately gay characters' pleas for tolerance seriously when the movie goes out of its way to make every homosexual in it a fussy, mincing queen? How can we accept Chuck's climactic admonition against the word "faggot" - his *de facto* chastising of Sandler's own fan base - when the movie previously invited, and all but *demanding*, raucous audience laughter at Chuck's use of the term?

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Amazingly, given all this, *Chuck & Larry* doesn't come close to being the nadir in the Happy Gilmore canon. The sweet-tempered Kevin James, bless his heart, actually manages to suggest a human being, and despite its obviousness, the movie isn't *completely* devoid of cleverness. Ving Rhames plays a sissy with such invention that he makes you laugh despite knowing better, and against all expectation, there's even a relatively sharp don't-drop-the-soap-in-the-shower sequence. (It represents a first in the Sandler *oeuvre* : slow-motion used in the service of *wit* .)

Besides, in the end, any conceivable complaints about the handling of *I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry* 's subject matter are outweighed by the same old complaints about Happy Madison juvenilia. The insistence that fat people are inherently funny. The insistence that farting is inherently funny. The insistence that *Rob Schneider* is inherently funny. (Portraying an elderly, Canadian-Asian minister here, he's never been *less* so.) I'd be more upset by the movie's politics if the filmmakers themselves didn't suggest that they were too young to vote.