Written by Mike Schulz
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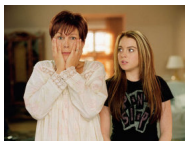

FREAKY FRIDAY

Everyone I know has enormous fondness for the 1976 Disney comedy *Freaky Friday*, wherein mother Barbara Harris and daughter Jodie Foster switched bodies and discovered, on one very strange day, how the other half lived.

So the news that Disney was remaking the film – *again*, after a mid-'90s TV-movie version – was understandably greeted with a collective
Why?
During the first 20 minutes of this latest
Freaky Friday
, directed by Mark Waters, you probably still won't understand why. Again, we're introduced to an uptight mom (Jamie Lee Curtis) and her free-spirited child (Lindsay Lohan), clued in as to how little they communicate, and asked to root for body-switching fun to ensue. Yet it's all a bit much. Curtis isn't just a type-A personality but a psychologist who juggles cell phones and is in a constant tizzy; Lohan isn't just an angst-y adolescent but a wannabe grunge rocker with an
outré
wardrobe – we get it, they're
different
. Add to this Curtis' milquetoast fiancé (Mark Harmon) and an egregiously annoying little brother (Ryan Malgarini, whose wickedly good double-takes make up for his phony line readings), and it'd seem to be another of Disney's obnoxiously obvious family comedies,
à la

Disney's The Kid
.

And then a funny thing happens: The leading duo does indeed switch bodies, and the whole film moves into a different realm, one of true wit and charm, and almost shocking poignancy. The family-values messages are all firmly in place, and there aren't really any plot surprises, but Waters directs this *Freaky Friday* with a canny understanding of how tricky mother-daughter relationships can be, and in Curtis and Lohan, he's found two leading ladies whose portrayals could hardly be bettered. Lohan is a wonderful natural talent, doing prim-and-highstrung like a comic ace and pulling off moments that seem absolutely spontaneous, as when she unconsciously lowers a friend's navel-revealing blouse. And Curtis is a marvel. A tremendous physical comedienne – her backwards somersault off a couch must be seen to be believed – Curtis is also incredibly moving here, unfailingly displaying teen uncertainty and pettiness and open-heartedness. (Curtis' performance is even better than Tom Hanks' similar, Oscar-nominated turn in *Big*.) After a shaky start, *Freaky Friday* emerges as a terrifically likable work, and thanks to Curtis and Lohan, one that's often even better than that.

S.W.A.T.

Have our nation's film critics been so pummeled by this summer's rash of senseless blockbuster wannabes that they've simply given up trying to attack them? This past weekend provided yet another hit-of-the-moment, a film version of the beloved (?) '70s cop show *S.W.A.T.* , and another reminder that, instead of creating another potential film franchise that no one could conceivably care about, $75 million should *occasionally* go to a useful cause, like building schools or curing disease. The movie is as formulaic as could be, wastes the talents of a fine cast in stock roles, and is such a compendium of shoot-outs and chases and tough-guy clichés that I spent the whole movie fighting the urge to nap. Yet I'm sensing a collective case of ennui in the reviews of *S.W.A.T.* – "Well, it's no

Citizen Kane
, but as cop movies go, it isn't bad." Um ... yeah, it is.

I will grant that the film features a novel storyline, one that, in the trailers at least, did capture my interest: A crime lord (hilariously overplayed by Olivier Martinez) heading to federal prison offers a $100-million reward to whoever frees him along the way. I had imagined a barrage of the worst of Los Angeles' worst battling our Special Weapons and Tactics team to collect the loot; how disappointing that this plot is merely used to "surprise" us when a couple of S.W.A.T.-trained officers jump the fence and join the villain's cause. The whole movie makes you expect more than you eventually get. Written by David Ayer, Jim McClain, and Ron Mita, and directed by cop-show veteran Clark Johnson, *S.W.A.T.* spends an inordinate amount of time on the development of its characters, but they
have
no character; Colin Farrell and Samuel L. Jackson are given backstory that leads to nothing more than rote action-figure roles, and LL Cool J, Michelle Rodriguez, and Josh Charles are all "characters" with nothing to do. And the film's action set pieces are completely routine, homogenized for PG-13 acceptability and dull, dull, dull. True,
S.W.A.T.
isn't as obnoxious as
Bad Boys II
or
2 Fast 2 Furious
, but it shares those films' combination of the loud and the logy, and its arrival forces some of us, unfortunately, to pray that summer – the spate of summer
movies
, at least – reaches its end soon.

GIGLI

At this point, I doubt that much more needs to be said about the Ben Affleck/Jennifer Lopez vehicle *Gigli*; Martin Brest's work is already permanently ensconced in the Bad Movie Hall of Fame, right alongside *Heaven's Gate*, *Ishtar*, and last summer's *The Adventures of Pluto Nash*. And

considering that the film, in less than two weeks, has already all but left a theatre near you, there seems to be little point in continuing the tirade. Yet *Gigli* might be a special case. This movie is so abhorrent, so staggeringly offensive, that you don't just want to hurl insults at it; you want to kick it in the shins repeatedly 'til it cries.

If this were an ordinary Bad Movie, of course, it wouldn't be causing such a ruckus. We'd listen to *Gigli*'s bizarrely unfunny dialogue and watch its scenes that just wouldn't freaking *end* and witness Affleck's – what? – 50th terrible performance in the past five years and eventually shrug it all off: Ah well, another Hollywood suck-fest. But what-oh-what did we moviegoers do to deserve *Gigli*'s story, which is like *The Sopranos* -meets- *Rain Man* as performed by a pack of wolverines? What did we do to warrant the film's mentally impaired kidnapee (Justin Bartha), whose malady seems to blend Down Syndrome, Tourette's Syndrome, and autism into one cute-and-cuddly package, complete with quotable catchphrases? ("I wanna go to the Baywatch!") Or Lopez's out-and-proud lesbian switching teams for Affleck's monosyllabic stud, six years after the man performed a similar rescue in *Chasing Amy*? Or Lopez's ex-lover attempting suicide by slashing her wrists and the movie playing it for laughs? Or Al Pacino's requisite bellowing accompanied by outrageously fey mincing? If memory serves, I smiled at the movie exactly once – at Christopher Walken's delivery of the retort "Just fine" – and spent the rest of the film's two-plus hours trying to lift my jaw up off the floor. Lest anyone think that the negative press for *Gigli* is merely a reaction to our having to endure the tabloids' unending Ben-and-J. Lo Show, trust me, the film would be just as god-awful with anyone else in the leads; rarely has a movie so completely deserved its spectacular failure.