

'Mr. Saturday Night' is catchy like the fever

Billy Crystal makes his debut behind the camera, directing himself as comic Buddy Young over a 50-year time span.

by Hollywood Rob



Crystal as Buddys young and old. 'Mr. Saturday Night' chronicles the 50-year bittersweet life and career of a stand-up comic.

Buddy Young Junior joins a small, distinguished group of characters to graduate from the small screen of "Saturday Night Live" to an alternate life on the silver screen.

Jake and Elwood Blues found they could do something besides sing while destroying Chicago and Wayne found there is a "World" outside the basement with his faithful sidekick Garth.

Buddy Young Junior, a minor character rarely seen in Crystal's year-long stint on "SNL" gets an entire life in the film "Mr. Saturday Night."

Unlike the other films to come out of the "SNL" stable, this one is played for more than laughs. It explores the range of emotions experienced by its characters throughout their lifetime.

Billy Crystal does an excellent job in his directorial debut, delivering the story of borchst-belt comedian Buddy Young Junior. His story starts in the present with a hilarious monologue where he (Crystal) spouts to a reporter about his start in comedy, performing for the family with his brother Stan (David Paymer). The characterizations are brutal, as is Buddy's humor throughout the film.

Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel (*Parenthood*, *City Slickers*) handle *Mr. Satur-*

day Night's writing chores and do a remarkable job of delivering a small story on human terms.

We find the present-day Buddy performing in rest homes and he's very bitter about it. It seems his career never took off like those around him, which his brother attributes to Buddy's lack of control. He goes to extremes to get exactly what he wants at any cost.

Buddy is not instantly likeable, even though he is a walking punch line. The film itself goes down like candy-coated razor blades with tear-jerking dramatic events backed by belly-to-belly laughs. It's as touching as it is funny.

Mr. Saturday Night is in essence a character study of a man who almost made it. He languishes in anonymity to age 70, still looking for his one big break. Meanwhile, his family has been falling apart and he doesn't even notice.

The character sends a message to the world as a whole. Buddy never listens and never communicates his true feelings to anyone.

There is one scene where Buddy's daughter is watching him on television. He is telling jokes about the family, but her mother reassures her that "it's only a joke." The real trouble here is he never communicates to his daughter directly and it causes much of his own grief. He lives for performing and stands as a sad characterization of humanity, caring about anything and everything but people.

The story jumps very

clearly from the present to the past and back again, a feat that seems filmmakers have forgotten how to do effectively. The weak framing device used in films like *For the Boys* and *Shining Through* is undeniable evidence.

The film only flashes back when it is pertinent to the story, allowing the movie to stay grounded in the present while giving you all the information you need to follow *Mr. Saturday Night* himself. Most of all, flashbacks occur to create a balance and reference point for the audience.

It is a sad movie, but it isn't blatant about it's button pushing. The reason the emotions come is because the story is purely human. It doesn't have to try hard to touch you, it just does and that is the sign of a good tale in my book.



Mr. Saturday Night

Starring Billy Crystal, David Paymer, Julie Warner, Helen Hunt. Directed by Billy Crystal.

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