



Budding Comedy Genius: Will Ferrell (left) adds zaniness to the laughably quirky "Elf."

Toning down smaltzy charm, Ferrell lovable in funny 'Elf'

By Kam Williams
Special to the Sentinel-Voice

This past February, Saturday Night Live alumnus Will Ferrell finally met with more than a modicum of success on the big screen after a long series of uneven outings.

The craggy-faced funnyman enjoyed his first bona-fide hit with "Old School," an over-the-top, back-to-college comedy best remembered for an extended scene where he ran naked through the streets while high as a kite. Though Mr. Ferrell may have proven himself capable of carrying an R-rated, T&A "teensploit," the question remained whether he might achieve the same results with a wholesome family picture.

Well, an affirmative answer has arrived in "Elf," a heartwarming tale to be enjoyed equally by young and old. In the title role, Ferrell plays Buddy, a baby put up for adoption who was raised at the North Pole after accidentally crawling into Santa's (Ed Asner) big bag of toys at an orphanage one Christmas Eve. Though reared by kindly Papa Elf (narrator Bob Newhart) as if one of his own, Buddy gradually grew to dwarf everyone around him.

Although appreciated as the only baritone in the Elf Choir, clumsy Buddy is a failure as one of Santa's little helpers. He's a well-meaning but clueless clown whose mistake always manages to throw a monkey wrench in the works.

Finally, after 30 years of hiding the secret, enterprising Papa Elf decides it's time to tell Buddy he's human. Turns out Buddy's mother has died, but that his father, Walter (James Caan), is alive and well and living in New York City. So buddy says good-bye to the only friends he's ever known, cracks off an

ice floe and paddles his way to the Big Apple.

This is the point of departure for Elf, a delightful, slapstick adventure about a naive innocent woefully ill-equipped to handle the rigors of life inside any impatiently unforgiving metropolis. But much like "Mr. Deeds," "Crocodile Dundee," "The Brother from Another Planet," "Arthur," "Stuart Little" and the endless movie list of other inveterately optimistic underdogs who have migrated to Manhattan, our hero rises to the occasion to prove that all you need is a pure heart to make it there.

There are the typical pratfalls, which come courtesy of wide-eyed, first encounters with escalators, revolving doors and the like. Yet, more hurtful than those physical boo-boos is our Elf's emotional pain at initially being rejected by a father who already barely has time for his wife (Mary Steenburgen) or 10 year-old son, Michael (Daniel Tay).

Fortunately, it's holiday time and Buddy gets a job at Gimbels as what else, but an elf. He even develops a romantic interest with an adoring blonde co-worker, Jovie (Zooey Deschanel), who never notices what a dork he is. After a comedy of errors, he ends up in jail and uses his one free call to contact his Scrooge of a father.

Will Dad finally catch the Christmas Spirit, take his long-lost son home for a bonding opportunity and learn an important lesson in life? Or is he a "meanie" fated to languish on Santa's Naughty List forever? It's not hard for anyone over the age of 5 to figure out what's going to happen. Remember, I said Elf was heartwarming. And a barrel of laughs, too.

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG for crude humor and mild epithets.

Sharpton to host 'Saturday Night Live'

WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrat Al Sharpton, whose one-liners and pointed rhetoric have added laughs to the presidential campaign, will host "Saturday Night Live" next month.

Sharpton will host the Dec. 6 show, which also will feature Pink as the musical guest. It could be a natural fit for the preacher, who often uses hu-

mor to promote his long-shot candidacy and is known to crack up his rivals during debates.

"He said he was actually - for the first time - nervous," said Sharpton spokeswoman Rachel Noerdlinger.

Other political figures who have appeared on the show include Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain, Jesse

Jackson and former Vice President Al Gore.

Although none of Sharpton's rivals for the Democratic nomination have been on, at least three have been depicted. Actors playing John Kerry, John Edwards and Joe Lieberman courted a real Gore for the vice presidency during Gore's appearance on the show last year.

Inspiration comes from the Soul.

"STUNNING!"
THE BOSTON GLOBE

"THIS CIRCUS
BURSTS WITH
ENERGY!"
CHICAGO SUN TIMES

UniverSoul Circus
is coming to
Las Vegas!!!



Cashman Center
Parking Lot D

Nov. 18-23, 2003

Ticket Master: 702-474-4000

Group Sales: 1-800-316-7439

www.universoulcircus.com