DVD Select: 'Blades of Glory' is absurdly funny

by Robert_J_Hawkins

In some weird warp of societal values, the ability to laugh at yourself is considered a mark of distinction among the pop culturatti. Celebrities, movie stars and athletes who are self-effacing are, like, regular people.

That being the case, the figure skating crowd is just a great old down-to-earth bunch.

'BLADES OF GLORY' - Will Ferrell and Jon Heder star in the comedy 'Blades of Glory.' CNS Photo courtesy of Suzanne Hanover. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the $1 bin Just look at how many signed up to spoof themselves and their - is it a sport? - their "thing" in the absurdly funny Will Ferrell comedy "Blades of Glory" (Paramount, 3 stars).

Like that is such a hard thing to do.

Among the skating luminaries who once gleamed like sequins on the ice are Scott Hamilton, Nancy Kerrigan, Brian Boitano, Sasha Cohen, Jamie Sale, Yuka Sato, Dorothy Hamill and Peggy Fleming. Tonya Harding and Elvis Stojko are there in spirit and the names of a half dozen more are evoked from time to time.

The movie is classic Will Ferrell. This is "Talladega Nights" on ice. "Anchorman" with blades. "Zoolander" with, well, with the same strutting peacocks.

Ferrell is the bad boy of figure skating, Chazz Michael Michaels. His skating routines are all testosterone and crude sexual innuendo set to hard rock. He got his start as a runaway kid in "Detroit's underground sewer skating scene." Yeah, a bit of Elvis Stoyko, with some DNA borrowed from Steven Tyler and Jim Morrison.

He's the best male figure skater on ice.

And when he's not the best, his arch-rival Jimmy MacElroy (Jon Heder) is.

The delicate, fey Jimmy is touted as ice skating's "little orphan awesome." He was plucked form an orphanage - harvested is more like it - by the rich and ambitious Darren MacElroy who raises him to be the greatest skater ever. The adoption thing was a matter of convenience. You'll see.

In a freakish coincidence of scoring, Jimmy and Chazz end up tied for the gold medal and promptly pummel each other right off the podium and right out of the sport. They are stripped of their medals and banished for life by a court that includes Boitano, Kerrigan, Fleming and Hamill.

Jimmy's "father" promptly dumps him. Chazz hits the bottle and the skating babes in a children's ice show called Grublets on Ice, produced and managed by Rob Corddry in a nifty cameo. In their own ways, they're both about a low as a skater could skink. Wait, Chazz is much lower.

They both get a second chance when Jimmy's old coach, uh, Coach (Craig T. Nelson, of course) uses a loophole in the rules to sign the two arch-enemies up in the pairs figure skating competition. Which leads one outraged skater to huff, "As if skating wasn't gay enough already!"

All I can say is their attempts to reconcile their male sexuality with the groin-oriented routines they perform will bring tears to your eyes.

Their arch-rivals in pairs skating is the syrupy brother-sister team of Stranz (Will Arnett) and Fairchild Van Waldenberg. Stone-cold media monsters who will stop at nothing to win the gold medal.

Directors Josh Gordon and Will Speck - best known for the GEICO caveman commercials - are the new stars of feature comedy films. There are so many ways in which "Blades of Glory" could have gone terribly wrong and they didn't let it go down any of those roads.

There are scene stealers in this film too - not an easy trick with Ferrell, Heder, Arnett and Poehler chewing up every scene. Two of the stealthiest are Nick Swardson as Hector, a truly warped stalker of Jimmy and the lovely Jenna Fischer (Pam on "The Office") as Katie, the much abused younger sibling of the Van Waldenbergs.

The extras are definitely worth a look. Let me know if Ferrell is really losing his cool during an interview or if it is classic mind-messing. Be sure to see the cut scene in which the early and shocking childhood connection between Jimmy and Chazz is disclosed.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"The Year of the Dog" (Paramount, 2 stars) A bleak comedy so weird and dark that you'd think it were French, but it isn't. Molly Shannon is Peggy Spade, a single working woman whose spot of warmth in life is a beagle named Pencil. Mostly she spends her life as a "compassionate listener" while others obsess about their boring lives. Only Pencil gives her comfort. Then he dies, of toxic poisoning. Peggy slowly slides toward a nervous breakdown while those around her continue their obsessing. The supporting cast is terrific. John C. Reilly plays her red-meat hunter neighbor. Peter Sarsgaard is a crusading animal shelter worker, and her brief fling into the relationship thing. Laura Dern is her sanitary suburban sister-in-law. Josh Pais is her emotionally constipated boss. Regina King is her ditzy and shallow girlfriend. The star is writer-director Mike White, who in interviews on DVD seems to have remarkable similarity of character and demeanor to his star, Shannon. Hmmm.

"Offside" (Sony, 2 1/2 stars) Director Jafar Panahi's insightful comedy of life in Iran, in particular the young soccer-loving women who try to sneak into a stadium for a critical World Cup playoff game. Iranian women are not allowed into such public gatherings, only men and western women. The girls end up in a holding pen, just beyond the field. They can hear the crowds but can not see the excitement. Exquisite torture.

"Air Guitar Nation" (Docurama, 2 1/2 stars) Yes, there are people who will get up on stage and prance about to bouncy rock music, pretending to be holding a guitar. And the best of these get to go to Oulu, Finland to compete in the international Air Guitar Competition. This is their story, and it's a quirky one. Especially enjoyable are the red-kimonoed C. Diddy (David Jung) and the scruffy New Yorker Bjorn Turoque (Dan Crane) who end up in a bi-coastal battle for U.S. supremacy. As one contestant, who'd obviously seen "Blades of Glory" states: "It's judged like figure skating and it's probably less absurd to watch ... if you think about it." My take? Don't really think about it.

IT CAME FROM TV

Straight from the tube factory to your TV set: The biggest and most anticipated show from TV, season one of

"The Heroes" is a seven-disc set, holding 23 episodes.

Also, season two of "The Odd Couple"; the first season of the gay Logo channel's animated series "Rick & Steve"; the acclaimed first season of sports drama "Friday Night Lights"; Volume 2 of the Disney kid-thriller "Flight 29 down"; season two of "Prison Break" and from A&E the standup performance of Rowan Atkinson.

One that debuts Aug. 28 but only in Starbucks coffee shops: "Saturday Night Live: The Best of 06/07." See Amy Poehler and Maya Rudolph in "Bronx Beat"; Darrell Hammond's deadly impression of Donald Trump; and the already classic but unmentionable Andy Samberg-Justin Timberlake digital sketch.

The nine-disc set of "Danger mouse" captures all 89 episodes, including the never-aired pilot episode.

FROM THE VAULTS

"3:10 to Yuma" (Sony, 1957) A classic Western drama starring Glenn Ford as a brutal gang leader and Van Heflin as the young maverick determined to bring him in. Russell Crowe and Christian Bale have reprised those roles in a remake due in theaters shortly.

"Dr. T and the Women: Special Edition" (LionsGate, 2000) The late Robert Altman directed Richard Gere as an overworked gynecologist whose life is complicated by a host of women - wife, daughters, lovers, clients - played by Farrah Fawcett, Laura Dern, Shelley Long, Kate Hudson, Liv Tyler, Tara Reid and Helen Hunt.

"Teachers" (MGM, 1984) The Arthur Hiller-directed drama and life in an inner city institution stars Nick Nolte, JoBeth Williams, and Judd Hirsch.

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