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IN TOMORROW'S PAPER: Theresa Tayler reports from this year's Juno Awards. Get the scoop in Showbiz



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Entertainment Movies

Fri, April 4, 2008

Nothing wasted in this mock doc

By JIM SLOTEK, SUN MEDIA

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To paraphrase the Bard, I come to praise toilet humour, not to bury it and let it decompose.

Specifically, I'm here to confess that the most laughs I've had watching a movie so far this year came from Kenny -- a surprisingly sensitive and well-drawn Australian mock-documentary about a decent bloke who just happens to clean porta-potties for a living.

Despite the fact that it has a protagonist who apparently can't go two sentences without a poo reference, Kenny is subtler than American cousins like Talladega Nights or Walk Hard, and matches the works of Christopher Guest for realism (it uses the same doc-verite interview style). There is no winking in Kenny, no overt reference to the movie being a goof and not a single performance that would qualify as over-the-top. (The Aussie accents are so realistic and thick, the movie comes with subtitles, a la the original Mad Max).

Kenny is, in fact, two mock-docs in one. The first half-hour involves following around this professional "honeydipper" as he does his work, taking orders for events over the phone (his list of questions includes, "Will there be liquor, will there be spicy food like curry?" all of which directly affects the number of porta-potties necessary per capita and the "solid-to-liquid ratio").

This is the part of the movie that brings out the Beavis and Butt-head in all of us, with one well-crafted toilet line after another (my personal favourite: "There's a smell down here that will outlast religion!"). There's also rumination on whether dogs are embarrassed when they defecate, a debate that could have come straight out of Clerks.

If that was all there was to Kenny, it would still be worth the laughs, but eventually become tiresome. What fleshes out the movie is the unfolding of Kenny's life, pain and pride. It's a portrait of a guy doing one of the world's most important and simultaneously detested jobs, and doing his best to hold his head up against all opprobrium.

Despite the respectable \$1,200 a week he pulls in, Kenny Smyth (Shane Jacobson) is a pariah, even to his own family. His brother (played by his real-life brother, director Clayton Jacobson) won't allow him in the house in overalls, even clean ones. His objectionable father (Ronald Jacobson) calls him "a glorified turd



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burglar!" And his ex-wife tells his son that his dad is going to Hell.

Kenny does have subordinates, one of whom is enthusiastic but psychotic, and one who clearly doesn't have the stomach for his job (when a woman loses her wedding ring in a porta-potty he merely reports it to his boss, who takes it upon himself to grope about for it).

But Kenny's besieged self-esteem gets an unexpected goose when he's asked to attend a portalo conference in Nashville. Just being himself, he manages to charm a stewardess (Eve von Bibra) who convinces him to hit the town with her. They're joined by a Japanese hi-tech toilet exec (Morihiro Hasebe) who is nearly killed on a mechanical bull and is henceforth dubbed "the Sushi Cowboy."

Kenny's adventures underscore both his heart and his charm. Suddenly a big-time seller (thanks to his Japanese connection) and an unlikely ladies man, he faces a promotion that must settle the question whether you choose a life of poo or it chooses you.

As a portrait of an uncommon common-man, Kenny is as much reminiscent of Paddy Chayefsky's Marty as any of the films in the now-crowded mock-doc genre. Good on the Aussies for raising the bar.

KENNY

1 HOUR, 39 MINUTES

STARRING: SHANE JACOBSON, RONALD JACOBSON, EVE VON BIBRA

DIRECTOR: CLAYTON JACOBSON

Sun Rating: 4 out of 5 stars

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