

'Dream Team' is leaden; creative vignettes appeal

By Judith Trojan
NC News

NEW YORK — "The Dream Team" (Universal) is a slim comedy about four mental patients accidentally separated from their therapist during a field trip in New York City.

The contrived premise leadenly directed by Howard Zieff ("House Calls," "Private Benjamin") sees the four zanies robbed of their devoted doctor en route to an outing at Yankee Stadium. When Dr. Weitzman (Dennis Boutsikaris) is knocked out after he witnesses some crooked cops commit murder, his patients — Billy, Henry, Jack and Albert — must fend for themselves in the big city. They also must locate the comatose Weitzman, hospitalized as a John Doe, before the cops find him and snuff out their witness for good.

Billy (Michael Keaton), a tightly wound writer with a penchant for fantasy exploits and violent solutions, is most equipped to take the lead. The rest of the gang follow along and do their best not to lose their grip. Compulsively neat and orderly Henry (Christopher Lloyd), a former postal employee, thinks he's a therapist. High-powered advertising executive Jack (Peter Boyle) blew his cool when he found religion and was reborn as Jesus. And semicatatonic Albert (Stephen Furst) converses using dialogue he learned on television, which has been his only contact with the outside world in 12 years.

That this loony bunch is able to outsmart the New York City Police Department and save Weitzman at the 110th hour can only be credited to an implausible script surprisingly devoid of laughs. Lloyd's turn as a neat freak who singlehandedly attempts to clean up the littered streets of Manhattan inspires a few chuckles, as does Boyle's Messianic zeal. But Furst ("St. Elsewhere") is lost here as a pathetic soul with an unclear illness. Keaton makes a valiant effort to pump life into the listless scenario, which uncomfortably attempts to balance

comedy and pathos.

It's tricky to make a joke out of mental illness. "The Dream Team" tries, and for the most part fails.

Due to some rough language, brief violence and a flash of nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'New York Stories'

Touchstone Pictures, a division of Disney, consistently shows farsighted creative and marketing savvy. Its latest release, "New York Stories," is an inspired trilogy of short dramatic vignettes filmed in and about New York City by notable directors, actors and production talent.

Programming short films in theatrical venues is always risky. But in this case, with directors Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola and Woody Allen at the helm, short films never have been so appealing.

Scorsese opens the show with "Life Lessons," a wacky whine of a movie about a noted abstract painter (Nick Nolte) who's losing his grip on his young mistress-assistant (Rosanna Arquette). Scorsese frenetically explores the angst of this middle-aged artist who's stressed out by the demands of an upcoming show and the callous rejection of yet another unsuitable lover.

Coppola and his 17-year-old daughter, Sofia, spin out a beguiling cotton-candy fantasy in "Life Without Zoe." Wealthy 12-year-old Zoe (Heather McComb in an uneven film debut) lives in regal splendor in the Sherry Netherland Hotel, while her father, a world-famous flutist (Giancarlo Giannini), and her photojournalist mother (Talia Shire) are off working and playing in separate parts of the globe.

The precocious adolescent hopes for their reconciliation, but meanwhile is quite self-sufficient in her rarefied world of



Woody Allen sits in a movie theater in a scene from "Oedipus Wrecks," one of the three short films that make up "New York Stories."

rich and famous. There isn't much to this trifle except exquisite sets (thanks to Coppola's favorite production designer, Dean Tavoularis), a magical children's costume party and the sight of gorgeous Giannini ("Seven Beauties") as Zoe's worldly, loving dad.

Since writer Woody Allen is as talented with the short story form as he is with a camera, it comes as no surprise that his contribution to this trilogy, "Oedipus Wrecks," has the most substance. It also has the most laughs, the best ensemble acting and it restores Allen, the actor, to his much-missed place in front of the camera.

Allen is neurotic New York lawyer Sheldon Mills (formerly Millstein). At 50,

he is engaged to a divorced WASP (Mia Farrow) with three blond children, but is still henpecked by his Jewish mother (Mae Questel, formerly the voice of Betty Boop). No matter that he's a professional success, his mom's nagging and humiliating banter reduce him to a quivering mass of Jell-O. He secretly wishes she would just disappear. When he gets his wish, the fun begins, and Sheldon never had it so bad.

Due to some sexual banter and suggestions of illicit liaisons, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Trojan is on the staff of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.



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