

Simplistic plots, characters doom comedies

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — In the gender-bender "Switch" (Warner Bros.), a confirmed male chauvinist dies and then returns to earth as a female so he can earn his angel's wings.

Steve (Perry King) is a real lady-killer, but the tables get turned when three of his fed-up ex-lovers (JoBeth Williams, Lysette Anthony and Victoria Mahoney) kill him.

Judged not yet acceptable for heaven, he wakes up, his sexist mind intact, but locked inside a curvy female body. Pretending to be Steve's half-sister, "Amanda" (Ellen Barkin) finds out firsthand how women are "treated like a piece of meat." Her reactions are still male, however, and she slugs anyone who hits on her.

Inheriting Steve's ad agency job, Amanda cops out on seducing a potential client — who is a lesbian (Lorraine Bracco) — but is less successful fending off Steve's buddy Walter (Jimmy Smits). Her subsequent pregnancy allows her time to rethink male and female roles with an eye toward ensuring her spiritual redemption.

Writer-director Blake Edwards' tired, heavy-handed script makes this sex-change comedy much less successful than his previous "Victor/Victoria."

While it's initially amusing seeing miniclad Barkin stumbling around in stiletto heels and sitting legs akimbo, her mugging and macho posturing wear thin fast. Other roles are played just as broadly, except for nice-guy-at-heart Smits, who is a winsome foil for Barkin's antics.

The movie portends to ridicule sexist behavior, but this rings hollow and, since it



Cinema Plus L.P.
Ellen Barkin stars as Amanda (Steve) Brooks in *Switch*, described by Warner Brothers as a comedy of sexual manners.

never dares to branch out beyond the obvious and the vulgar, it's just one long lame joke.

Just as significantly, the tacked-on pro-life message at the end is contrived and thoroughly unconvincing.

Due to blatant sexist attitudes, barroom brawls played for laughs, recurring rough language, frequent sexual innuendo, some recreational substance abuse and brief nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Mannequin Two'

A thousand-year spell is broken when the wooden statue of a peasant girl springs to life in the silly sequel "Mannequin Two: On the Move" (20th Century Fox).

On his first day at work in a Philadelphia department store, Jason (William Ragsdale) removes a necklace from a mannequin-statue newly arrived from an exotic country. Presto — the wooden statue of the enchanted Jesse (Kristy Swanson) springs to life, gazing adoringly at her rescuer.

The rest of the movie deals with Jason protecting Jesse's now less-than-wooden form from the clutches of snaky Count Spretzle (Terry Kiser) and his three gooney bodyguards who are intent on shipping her home.

A follow-up to the minor 1987 comedy "Mannequin," director Stewart Raffill's sequel is a pretty lamebrained effort at slapstick.

A simplistic plot and stick-figure characters weigh it down. Ragsdale shows boyish

charm but that's about all that can be said for his role; porcelain pretty Swanson isn't required to act, only to dash about in a skinny mini no larger than a dishtowel. The beefy bodyguards sound and look like Arnold Schwarzenegger "wannabes" in triplicate.

Only Meshach Taylor ("Designing Women"), who reprises his role as the store's outrageously gay interior designer, goes at it with gusto, happily hamming it up.

It's fairly innocuous as an adolescent fantasy if you overlook the sexual stereotyping and the empty adoration of female beauty inherent in the plot. But overall, it's more of a stiff than a model movie, so "Mannequin Two: On the Move" isn't going anywhere.

Because of mild sexual innuendo and brief, cartoonlike violence, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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