

# Sequels fall short of capturing originals' spirit

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — It's a bit old hat — or is it old habit? — when Whoopi Goldberg again goes undercover as a nun in *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* (Touchstone).

In a razzle-dazzle opening scene, Las Vegas headliner Deloris (Goldberg) belts out Motown mega-hits before a packed audience, but knows the presence of Sisters Mary Patrick (Kathy Najimy), Mary Lazarus (Mary Wickes) and Mary Robert (Wendy Makkena) must mean trouble.

Sure enough, they coax her back to San Francisco and Mother Superior (Maggie Smith), who persuades her to briefly put her career on hold in favor of teaching music to rowdy adolescents at rundown St. Francis Academy.

Lest the priest in charge (Barnard Hughes) scorn her questionable credentials, Deloris resumes her charade as Sister Mary Clarence.

Not only are the kids out of control, the school is out of money, and unless Deloris can create a charismatic choir to win the all-state competition, St. Francis is out of business.

Bill Duke directs an amiable comedy sequel at a distinct disadvantage, since the idea of sassy Goldberg as a nun is no longer original.

What results is a story that increasingly resembles the movie and TV series *Fame*, as a group of talented, racially mixed students learn discipline and come into their own in song and dance. The 23 youngsters are an appealing group and viewers will end up rooting for them.

Smith, though, has lost her archy starchiness and her Mother Superior ends up as bland as Hughes' milquetoast Father Maurice. Three other teaching priests (Michael Jeter, Thomas Gottschalk and Brad Sullivan) act like buffoons better suited to playing cartoon characters such as Goofy, Grumpy and Dopey. The sisters, however, are good foils for Goldberg, who gives an upbeat and confident performance sure to please her fans.

Much is made of the teens' disrespectful attitudes and the narrative works hard at stressing how Sister Mary Clarence commands their respect and motivates them to care about their talents and goals. Some will find the education message on the preachy side, but then again, in our troubled society some things can't be said often enough.

The movie's high points are the musical numbers; in fact, the movie moves in fits and starts as if to accommodate them. Among the slack sections is a contrived



Whoopi Goldberg (center) is lured away from her thriving Las Vegas career to help the sisters of St. Catherine's teach at an inner-city Catholic school in *Sister Act II*, a Touchstones Pictures release.

subplot about a student (Lauryn Hill) in conflict with a mother (Sheryl Lee Ralph) who thinks her daughter's singing is no substitute for studying.

James Coburn's role as the heartless school administrator could easily have been left on the cutting-room floor. You know he's the bad guy when he identifies the youngsters as "the choir that looks like it just robbed a convenience store."

There are so many minor flaws scattered throughout the movie that it is easy to lose sight of the fact this is a musically entertaining and wholesome movie, even if it falls short of its offbeat predecessor.

Due to very minor sexual innuendo, comic treatment of religious and an instance of profanity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### 'Wayne's World 2'

That it is not mean-spirited is about the best thing that can be said about goofy goings-on in *Wayne's World 2* (Paramount).



*Wayne's World 2* stars Mike Myers (left) as Wayne Campbell and Dana Carvey as Garth Algar.

Reprising their nerdy roles are Mike Myers and Dana Carvey as Wayne and Garth, scruffy stars of a cable access show in Aurora, Ill. This go-round the dopey duo are having girlfriend troubles while orchestrating Waynestock, a Woodstock-like concert which Wayne literally dreamed up.

Shy Garth has met an aggressive seductress (Kim Basinger), who begins hinting it would be nice if Garth would rub out the pesky husband he didn't know existed.

And Wayne suspects his songstress girlfriend (Tia Carrere) is starting to fall for her manager (Christopher Walken).

Meanwhile, no one is buying tickets to Waynestock, nor have any bands signed

on, though in Wayne's dreams a near-naked Native American (Larry Sellers) and a dead rock star (Michael Nickles) keep insisting they will come if he has the concert.

Director Stephen Surjik simply lets Myers and Carvey entertain the audience with silly skits and sophomoric situations, which proved amazingly successful in the original.

Not wanting to tinker with the formula, it is more of the same airhead humor, with cameo appearances and spoofs of other movies tossed in the mix but serving as little more than window dressing.

There are a few amusing scenes peppering the loosely written script as when Wayne engages his girlfriend's Chinese father (James Hong) in a martial arts duel, kindly providing the audience with subtitles and dubbing.

More often, however, the comic observations are about as solid as the sand Wayne dreams he walks upon. If you're not a Wayne-and-Garth fan, you might prefer to keep your head in the sand for this slack sequel.

Though aimed at the teens-and-up audience, there is enough racy content to suggest this is an adult movie, and not an especially wholesome one at that.

Because of minor violence, frequent sexual innuendo, recurring rear nudity and occasional profanity, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## Latest Wangerin effort provides no significant analysis

*Mourning Into Dancing*, by Walter Wangerin Jr.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan (Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1992); 293 pages; \$16.99.

By Father Sebastian A. Falcone  
Guest contributor

A superb storyteller. A skilled craftsman of phrase and paragraph. A dramatic evoker of conflicts and characters. Walter Wangerin Jr. is all of these things. Grant him, too, a touch of the poet here and there.

In 1978, *The New York Times* named Wangerin's *The Book of the Dun Cow* the best children's book of the year. After selling 600,000 paperback copies, the book gave Harper's Junior Books Department its largest paperback sale to date.

Ongoing debates made *Dun Cow* something of a literary phenomenon. Was the book a fable on the ageless struggle between good and evil, a modern bestiary, or a commentary on the carnage and devastation of war? Why had it been pub-



lished by the Junior Books Department at Harper & Row? Most importantly, was its audience the young, the less young, or the least young? The jury is still out.

These remarks, by way of introduction to the present review, underscore the fact that Wangerin continues to tell gripping stories — even when the inherent factors of communication (proportion, connectedness, relationship of details) are less than clear.

*Mourning Into Dancing* may well mystify the traditional reader who believes in a predictable menu for one's reading fare.

Wangerin instead offers huge servings of autobiographical narrative, broad explorations of the death experience, bereavement and grief, and long meditations on religious topics. The layout tends to overwhelm rather than elucidate.

Specifically, Wangerin breaks down life's relationships into four basic categories: the primal, the communal, the natural, and the internal. He divides "dying" into four categories as well. Grief invites analysis in four distinct acts. The redemptive drama of Jesus' story also admits of "four sacrifices."

Strewn in between this preoccupation with fourfoldness, one finds the narrator at his best in exciting personal encounters, masterful human profiles, touching moments of tragedy and trauma. All of this makes for imaginative reading of the first order, but raises suspicion about the basic value of the insights. At the very least, the disjointed flow makes one wonder whether the author has rushed too quickly from his sermons as a Lutheran

pastor or his weekly columns in two national magazines. The advice of the ancient poet Horace, about "the work of the file" (and rasp, one may add), seems to have been ignored.

Wangerin is a storyteller — with a capital "S." Mapmaker of psychological understanding he seems not to be.

*Mourning Into Dancing* will delight and dazzle. Its long-range value as a guidebook to the landscapes of life's deepest issues, however, is more impressionistic than reliably transferable. Read this latest offering of a prolific workman, now a full-time writer, but keep the perspective of a critical eye.

Wangerin continues to frequent the mid-space haunts of literary types. If one wants story, here is a commendable book — the author retains his singular touch. If one wants significant analysis, one would do well to go back to the tested standbys.

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