

## FEATURE

## Stiller clan delivers silly, light comedy

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The world of male modeling is comic fodder for Ben Stiller in the title role of his dopey comedy, "Zoolander" (Paramount). Stiller co-wrote the script and served as a producer besides directing the film. Stiller's wife, actress Christine Taylor, plays his love interest, reporter Matilda, and his father, Jerry Stiller, co-stars as crass model agency owner Maurv Ballstein. In addition, his mom, Anne Meara, and his sister, Amy, have cameos, so Stiller truly has turned his project into a family — as in his family — film.

As clueless Derek Zoolander, Stiller's vain, self-absorbed model loses his three-years-running status as "Male Model of the Year" to a younger but equally dense rival, Hansel (Owen Wilson).

Down and out, Zoolander falls prey to venal designer Mugato (Will Ferrell) to be the signature model for his new homeless-chic "Derelict" line. But rehearsals involve Zoolander being brainwashed by Mugato's minions to assassinate the Indonesian prime minister at the fashion show lest he pass legislation outlawing child slave labor that would reduce profits in the fashion industry. Zoolander's agent, Maury, is also in on the plot.

Trying to unravel all this is rookie reporter Matilda, whom Zoolander falls for after he and Hansel become buddies and



Paramount Pictures/CNS

Ben Stiller stars as Derek in a scene from the new film "Zoolander." The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-III — adults.

treat her to spiked tea and an ambiguous "love" fest that suggests a drug-induced orgy. This scene is the movie's one objectionable aspect because it treats implied promiscuity and getting high in a benign comic vein. Otherwise, the comedy is mostly goofy, sometimes funny, mildly satirical and never mean-spirited.

As a director, Stiller's pacing of the action waxes and wanes and, where stunt doubles are used, the editing is choppy. But the movie captures the shallowness

of the fashion industry where the plight of the homeless inspires a fashion trend.

Due to an implied orgy with brief recreational drug use, fleeting, stylized violence, sporadic profanity and some crude references, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-III — adults.

The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## A&amp;E special dissects capital case errors

By Anne Navarro  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — "Investigative Reports Special Edition: Death Penalty on Trial" is a dry two-hour special discussing the failures of the death penalty. It will be shown Tuesday, Oct. 16, 9-11 p.m. on the A&E cable channel.

If this "Investigative Reports" trial were held in a real court, the judge would have to declare a mistrial because the case is so skewed against the defendant. The program opens dramatically with a sound recording of an actual execution that took place in Georgia. From this melodramatic start, the program keeps its sensationalistic viewpoint by coming down hard against the death penalty.

Its negativity does not stem from any moral or ethical standpoint with regard to the concept of the death penalty per se, but from what the producers state as mistakes made during the judicial process of

a criminal defendant's case. The obvious concern is that innocent people may be put to death.

But the program delights in being able to point fingers at the failures of the judicial system without allowing any defense of it. It certainly is not concerned with the question of whether it is morally right to have the death penalty at all.

By combining dramatizations, interviews with defense attorneys, prosecutors and sometimes the defendants themselves, the program lists the areas in which the system has broken down. These include incompetent defense attorneys, overzealous prosecutors willing to hide evidence of innocence, biased judges, juror misconduct and improper police activity that makes the suspect fit the crime.

"Death Penalty On Trial" does bring up some interesting facts, though. All European nations and half the countries of the world have abolished the death penalty. Among those who use it (China, Iraq, Iran

and Saudi Arabia), the United States is the only country with a democratic government. And through DNA and the work of legal advocates, more than 90 people have been exonerated and freed from death row.

The program easily could have been cut back to create a tighter and more compelling package. The special is somewhat laborious and marked by redundancies. And, at the present time when the country has pulled together in support of our government, a program that so openly and harshly criticizes the federal government, no matter the accuracy of the information, may not be well received.

Parents may wish to watch "Death Penalty On Trial" with their adolescents to discuss the morality of the subject, which the program does not address.

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Navarro is on the staff of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.

## Diary grips, Aussie snores

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each videocassette is available in VHS format. Theatrical movies on video have a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating. All reviews indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

## 'Anne Frank' (2001)

Poignant drama frames the events described in Anne's diary to offer a more complete portrait of the courageous, free-spirited young girl (Hannah Taylor Gordon) from her hiding in an abandoned building with family to her death in a concentration camp. Based on Melissa Muller's biography and directed by Robert Dornhelm, the film is gripping despite some narrative bloating and features a moving performance by Ben Kingsley as Anne's father as well as nuanced performances from a fine supporting cast. Some violence including grim Holocaust images and a few scenes of discreet nudity. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America. (Buena Vista)

## 'Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles' (2001)

Leaden comedy in which an Australian crocodile hunter (Paul Hogan) travels from the outback to Los Angeles with his girlfriend (Linda Kozlowski) and son (Serge Gockburn) and ends up entangled in a murder mystery that involves movie studio warring political paintings. Director John Dahl's fish-out-of-water comedy has a few some mild laughs but the film is mostly a snore with a paper-thin, time-worn premise. Some mild violence and a smattering of crude words. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. (Paramount)

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