

Men With Brooms: Paul Gross Gets Too Ambitious

by Joel MEGGS

The best way I can sum up *Men With Brooms* is a cross between *Happy Gilmore*, *The Full Monty*, and a *Due South* episode. It's goofy to the extreme, very poorly written, sappy, and all the conclusive proof that I need that Canada cannot make good movies. It can't even really make bad ones, because when I compare this with what I consider a bad Hollywood movie, at least the Hollywood movies look professional. (*I can agree that Canada cannot make good movies, so long as we ignore 32 Short Films About Glenn Gould, Project Grizzly, Exotica, Last Night, The Red Violin, waydowntown, Hard Core Logo, The Sweet Hereafter, Jesus of Montreal, The New Waterford Girl, Margaret's Museum, The Hanging Garden, etc. I'd agree that Hollywood movies look professional* -Ed.)

Men With Brooms is a Canadian first in that it is being marketed aggressively. Apparently a million dollars has gone into marketing this film (still peanuts compared to American budg-

ets) and they traded away the TV rights to CBC in exchange for a perpetuity of commercials during the Olympics.

The movie looks like it should have just appeared on CBC to begin with and scrapped the idea of becoming the first Canadian blockbuster. There is nothing to distinguish this film from other (bad) Canadian TV and film, except that it is on the big screen. It has terrible dialogue, is ridiculously clownish, and I can tell you right now that it is going to be a box office disaster. It probably would have been a hit on CBC, mind you, as CBC audiences have a tendency to lap this sort of crap up. Why one needs look no further than the predictable slapstick (which passes as political satire) in such shows as *Air Farce* and *Red Green* to know that this country's label as a "funny place" is not well deserved. [Most of the Canadian funny men (Jim Carey, Matthew Perry, etc) do not put in time in Canadian productions. *SCTV* and *Kids in the Hall* were exceptions, but their humour was often very low brow, and as *Brain Candy* showed us, wouldn't sell in the theatres either). Hell, the fact that the *Beachcombers* ran for all those years says something about this country's tastes; I mean how many times can you watch Bruno fall into the water and still laugh? (*This country's tastes? One wonders if the esteemed reviewer has ever noticed that non-Canadian shows occasionally repeat jokes and use predictable slapstick. Say, Full House, Home Improvement, Suddenly Susan, Some Guys with a Pizza and Girls, Just Shoot Me, Family Matters, Who's the Boss?, Murphy Brown, Friends (which one is sleeping with who, now?), or, you know, nearly every sitcom ever made in any country, and the majority of television shows in general.* -Ed.)

Paul Gross wrote, directed, and starred in *Men With Brooms*. He, you may remember, was the star of *Due South*, a wildly popular Canadian show about a Mountie. Paul Gross probably thought he had a pretty good idea of what could make it as a uniquely Canadian romantic comedy. First, load it up with as much Canadian imagery as possible. This the movie succeeds in: all



Sweet Tooth were there.

the action takes place in the fictitious town of Long Bay, a nondescript everytown. Tim Horton's cups and Moosehead bottles are everywhere. Second, make it about curling-hockey would be too obvious, and it has been done. Thirdly, make lots of Canadian references that everyone, from coast to coast, can relate to as only Canadian in-jokes, and finally, rely on comedic staples like falling down, farting, injuries, old men swearing, young children swearing, people getting hit in the nuts, dumb blonds saying stupid things, and dumb guys saying and doing stupid things.

So the storyline is that an old man dies and has made it part of his will that his ashes be sealed up in a curling rock and that his old team reunite and play for the "Golden Broom" (I guess they couldn't get the rights to use "Scott Tournament of Hearts") using this rock in which his ashes are sealed up in. Okay, so we recognize that this is realism, because this sort of thing is quite legit and really quite plausible. But then things start to devolve. First of all, there is Paul Gross, who is the only competent one on the team: he has some issues. He has two girls fighting over him, one an astronaut and the other the astronaut's alcoholic sister. Then there's

his mushroom taking kooky father, with whom he's feuding. Seems that dad (played by Leslie Nielsen) was a curler once too, but then mom died and now father and son aren't talking because somehow curling drove them apart or something... It's all very formulaic anyway.

The rest of the team are just dumb people who drink a lot, say goofy things, get naked a lot, and do kooky things like jump off cliffs into frigid water. They've all got girl troubles of course: one has a low sperm count and is constantly having to have sex with his wife at awkward and potentially comedic moments, one has a wife that wants him to quit curling and join her in the snobby world of country clubs, and one has a debt with a huge burley biker-type who ends up getting hit in the head a lot with curling rocks, to great hilarity (supposedly).

Add to all this, curling announcers that can be heard all through the arena for some reason, who drink too much coffee, say funny things, start drinking beer and start falling down, an inexplicably out of place lesbian love affair between two characters who are effectively extras, and conflict resolution that is so flimsy it's laughable. And the dialogue!?

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