

Seasoned cast redeems film



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com
 "RED" features an award-winning cast, that saves the movie and acts as its only highlight. From left, John Malkovich ("Secretariat"), Morgan Freeman ("Invictus") and Bruce Willis ("Live Free or Die Hard").



BY KEN DUSOLD
 Staff Reviewer

Take the 1966 comedy "Casino Royale." Remove the James Bond story and the somewhat coherent script. Then add a bunch of aging Hollywood legends blowing stuff to kingdom come, complete with witty banter, and you are left with "RED."

The film, whose title is an acronym for "Retired: Extremely Dangerous," begins slowly. We are introduced to Frank Moses (Bruce Willis), a lonely, retired CIA operative with a slight gut, who spends his days watching his avocado grow in a pot of dirt on the kitchen table and phoning Sarah (Mary-Louise Parker), a single and bored customer service representative for Frank's pension program. Frank routinely rips up his pension checks, which gives him an excuse to call Sarah and claim they never arrived. How sweet, right? Think again. The first 10 minutes are unnecessary — the relationship between Frank and Sarah is explained again later — and risk inducing boredom.

The sluggish start thankfully takes a turn for the exciting when a small band of assassins, equipped with

some high-powered weaponry, pay Frank a visit at home one night. Of course, the 50-something Frank vanquishes them in impressively short order.

Frank — realizing Sarah might be in danger due to their extensive phone conversations — kidnaps his love interest (you thought your first date was bad) and checks in on his old pal Joe (Morgan Freeman) for help uncovering the party that wants him dead.

Joe, a former spy with an impressive professional history, is living out his final days in a depressing New Orleans nursing home. Freeman, in all his glory, adds dignity to a picture lacking such virtue in its script. Taking a cast of highly respected actors and expecting them to perform ridiculous stunts beyond the realm of even "Walker, Texas Ranger" is shameful.

From this point, Frank and Sarah unravel the evil plan to have certain "threats" removed and enlist the help of Marvin (John Malkovich), a paranoid ex-operative suffering from the effects of 11 years-worth of LSD experi-

ments. Malkovich is an actor one cannot refrain from watching without a smile and a great deal of anticipation for what he will do next. His portrayal in "RED" is simply hysterical.

Joining the ragtag team of miscreants is Academy Award winner Helen Mirren as Victoria, a British weapons specialist and assassin-turned-hotelier. In her first scene, Mirren comes off as a worried grandmother shearing her flowers ... until she pulls a semi-automatic rifle out from under the table linens. Mirren might not be seeing an Oscar nomination for her turn as Victoria, but she certainly kicks serious butt.

Indeed, the characters are what make "RED" worth watching, particularly if you like action comedies. In addition to terrifically funny and unexpected performances from Freeman, Malkovich and Mirren, the film benefits from Frank's John McClane-esque personality. Car chases, shoot-outs and massive explosions put Willis in all too familiar territory. Brian Cox, as an ex-KGB agent and Victoria's true love, draws

out a few hearty chuckles despite his inadequate Russian accent. A couple of surprise, brief appearances by spry 93-year-old Ernest Borgnine reinforce the acting icon's likeability. Richard Dreyfuss' presence as the bad guy is the only disappointment among the big-name stars, as he once again fails to breathe life into a career that has been faltering since the late 1970s (save for "Mr. Holland's Opus").

The action scenes, which are utterly unbelievable and unoriginal, are still entertaining with humor and pretty cool explosions. In fact, these moments are where Malkovich and Mirren shine most, such as the time Marvin avenges himself when a woman sporting a rocket-launcher calls him "old," or when Victoria gets the chance to use a heavy machine gun to rip apart a convoy of Chevy Suburbans.

The script is pretty lame, as the plot is too far-fetched and the characters too shallow — we know most about the relationship between Frank and Sarah, which has lasted the length of the film once the credits roll. However, the movie is worth checking out for its famous cast, who effectively send the audience home entertained.

Perhaps, the question about "RED" should not be, "Is the film good?" But, "Is the film worth seeing?" The answer would unequivocally be "Yes."

Cast humorously portrays diverse wedding party

BY JOHN O'BRIEN
 Staff Reviewer

Nothing brings bridesmaids together quite like a nice joint, a tray of hors d'oeuvres, sex and ugly dresses. At least, this is the case in Truman Theatre Department's student lab show presentation of Alan Ball's 1993 comedy, "Five Women Wearing the Same Dress," running at 8 p.m. tonight through Saturday, in the Black Box Theatre.

Set in the upstairs bedroom of a Knoxville, Tenn., estate, this comedy shows the action and drama that unfold between five bridesmaids desperate to escape the wedding reception going on downstairs. Although clad in the same gaudy dress, the five women have very strong, distinct personalities. Frances, the sheltered Christian, is the first of the bridesmaids to be introduced; followed by Meredith, the bride's rebellious, pot-smoking sister; Trisha, the unsatisfied beauty who has been with many men; Georgeanne, the unhappy, outrageous, former "ugly sidekick" of the bride; and Mindy, the witty, cheerful lesbian sister of the groom.

Despite their personality differences, the five women discover that a ridiculous dress is not the only thing they have in common. The Truman Theatre Department has succeeded once again with this quirky, heartwarming comedy directed by senior Amy Lamm. The production ran very smoothly with few mishaps. The Black Box Theater worked well for this particular show, placing the audience in Meredith's bedroom and allowing viewers to become a part of the production. Although some moments lacked appropriate emotional depth, the strong chemistry between the actors brought the performance to a new level.

The cast appeared to have fun performing, which increased the show's energy. The attention to detail greatly enhanced the believability of the production and the characters. The decision to speak without accents isolated the action from its intended Tennessee location but worked nonetheless. Each cast member remained in character and used appropriate gestures and facial expressions, including Mindy's sickly looks and Meredith's subtle "dancing" and mouthing-of-words while music played. The production allows audiences to feel a wide array of emotions, from gut-busting laughter at ridiculous

behavior and witty one-liners to sadness and empathy when characters reveal their dark pasts and address topics like sexual abuse.

Along with the strong connections within the cast, each member created a believable, memorable character. Freshman Sarah Andrews-Weiss effectively portrayed a wholesome, sheltered Christian in her role as Frances. With her naive character, Andrews-Weiss is a hilarious contrast to the other four "less Christian" women. Senior Angela Bubash skillfully portrayed the untrusting Trisha, a woman who has been around the block. Playing the upset, gregarious role of Georgeanne, senior Amber Collins showed a wide array of emotions, easing the pain of her lost love and failed marriage with sex, alcohol and outrageous behavior.

Playing the groom's lesbian sister, Mindy, junior Katrina Godfrey's spunky and witty personality made her character believable and enjoyable. Whether stripping down or lighting up, senior Jennifer Akers' portrayal of Meredith was notably strong, showing a wide range of emo-

tion and conveying a troubled woman with a dark past. The only male in the cast of six, sophomore Jeff Denight played Tripp Davenport, an usher at the wedding.

Denight showed strong chemistry with Bubash, creating a character seeking more than a one-night stand.

While the work of the cast was the primary strong point of the production, certain technical aspects also shone. The cleverly-designed set created by senior Arthur Virnig was the strongest technical aspect. Sound by Collins was also well designed, accomplishing the task of playing appropriate music under dialogue. The green bridesmaid dresses provided by Cotney College were both appropriate and vital to the show's plot and theme. Sophomore Dominic Cavicchia's attention to detail as props master also complemented the show nicely, providing all the necessary hors d'oeuvres, cigarettes and joints.

Complete with ugly bridesmaid dresses the cast and crew of Amy Lamm's production of "Five Women Wearing the Same Dress" represented the Truman Theatre Department well and will have audiences leaving the show with smiles on their faces and lighthearted attitudes.

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Theories study personal levels of sensation seeking

BY ELIZABETH NECKA
 Columnist

The children who accompanied my sister and me on that haunted hayride years ago might never forgive us.

We were the ones who began crying for our mother because the giant plastic spider hanging from the tree (in broad daylight, no less) seemed a bit too threatening when combined with the eerie crinkling sound of leaves beneath the wheels. We made them turn the hayride around. I remember thinking the rest of the kids were crazy — what in their right minds made them want to go into that scary forest?

Fast-forward sixteen years, and things have changed a bit. This Halloween season, I went to eight different haunted houses in one night, and I'm going to another tomorrow. My friends and I just can't get enough of them — each one outdoes the last with its intricate, original designs and spooks that

seem to hone in on the most easily intimidated member of the group.

Add my experiences to the mounting hype surrounding "Paranormal Activity 2" and the overabundance of "liked" Facebook statuses regarding post-viewing nightmares, and you can understand my question — why do we enjoy being scared? Wasn't 5-year-old Liz correct in thinking that people who choose to scare themselves were not right in the head?

Most theories of motivation suggest that we seek out pleasant experiences and avoid unpleasant ones. My being chased by a demonic, fluorescent clown carrying a chain saw would hardly be considered a "pleasant" experience — and yet, I still enjoyed that. Even though I had my arms crossed in the tightest possible hold around myself, I could hear my heart beating in my ears and I was focused on ignoring the clown long enough so that he would leave me alone. I can retrospectively assess the experience as pleasurable.

Theories of personality are the exception to this rule about pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Each of us has a different level in the personality dimension of sensation-seeking, and it's based on our innate biological level of baseline arousal. If our baseline level of arousal isn't met, we will seek out arousing situations. People who are high in the dimension of sensation seeking are likely to get bored easily, to lack inhibition, to seek out novel experiences and stimuli and to enjoy thrills. Therefore, to meet their level of arousal while doing homework, for instance, they might listen to music (to stimulate the additional sense of hearing). These are the same people who, like me, seek out the seemingly "unpleasant" experience of a haunted house.

Perhaps these individuals also enjoy experiencing intense emotion, whether happy or sad. In a February study in "Communication Research," researchers studied moviegoers of a horror film ("The Omen") in comparison to those who went to see a drama ("United 93"). In both cases,

the moviegoers who exhibited a high need for affect, which means that their personalities drove them to seek out emotions of any sort, were much more likely to enjoy the negative emotions they experienced from the movie, including fear. For these people, it seems that the emotional experience is pleasant, regardless of whether it has a positive or negative focus.

I think there's also something to be said about the socially acceptable release of going to a haunted house or a scary movie. There's something innately cathartic about screaming like a 5-year-old who doesn't want to be on the hayride, even though you've willingly chosen to pay \$23 for your

ticket. It's an exhilarating release of all of your pent-up energy from a week of midterms, perhaps. It's a chance to act like a fool so that you can laugh at

yourself later. The haunted house is a way to take everything a little less seriously and reframe the way you're thinking.

Halloween is this weekend — bringing with it the end of ample opportunities to fulfill your sensation-seeking desires with haunted houses and scary movies. Soon people like me, whose personalities prescribe them

to be high in sensation seeking and the need to feel, might have to be creative. Chances to scare ourselves or challenge our emotions abound, however. Skydiving, anyone?

Each of us has a different level in the personality dimension of sensations-seeking, and it's based on our innate biological level of baseline arousal.