

FILMS

WONDER BOYS

Michael Douglas, Tobey Maguire, Robert Downey Jr., Frances McDormand  
Directed by Curtis Hanson

**W**onder Boys is an episodic tragicomedy in search of a more cohesive story. The boys of the title are portrayed by Michael Douglas, looking every bit his post-50 age yet acting like he's never grown up; Robert Downey Jr. as his literary agent in desperate need of a best seller; and Tobey Maguire (fresh from his superb performance in *The Cider House Rules*) as the writing protégé dragged along for this lost-weekend adventure.

We're supposed to like Douglas as Grady Tripp, a ruffled, stubbled college professor who's had one great literary triumph, even if it was seven years ago. He's spent the intervening years writing his follow-up novel—all 2,116 pages of it—apparently while seeking inspiration from alcohol and Humboldt County's best weed. He's in real danger of becoming a one-

hit wonder when his agent comes to town to pressure him for the manuscript, accompanied by a sky-scraping trans woman as his date.

While Downey's character is identified as gay and fixes his gaze on the protégé after his date dumps him, the refreshing thing is that his gayness isn't much of an issue—or much of a plot point. He is just accepted at face value. And in light of Downey's current residence in a California cooler, it's no stretch to find him believable as a rather desperate drug-toting party animal.

The film feels like too many cooks had a hand in the editing—sometimes it seems like a screwball comedy caper, complete with a stolen car, a dead dog, a purloined jacket that belonged to Marilyn Monroe and a tuba. At other times there are glimpses into the agony of the creative life and the pain professor Tripp feels while witnessing his student surpass him.

There are plenty of laughs, but this film requires that you squelch any desire to analyze the plot for rationality. There are just too many

moments when Tripp could solve most of his problems with a few words, but chooses instead to prolong the trouble he gets into with his student in tow.

There's a subplot involving the women in Tripp's life, but it's very secondary to his artistic crisis. The Hollywood ending comes too fast and too simply to be anything other than a fairy tale, but for a few hours' diversion you could do much worse. *Wonder Boys* is scheduled to open this month.

I'M STILL HERE...DAMN IT!  
Sandra Bernhard

**I**n 1998 and 1999, Sandra Bernhard took *I'm Still Here...Damn It!* on the road; at her last stop, Slim's in San Francisco, her performance was filmed for an HBO special. Due out on video Feb. 29, the tape includes a bonus 30 minutes of outtakes not in the special.

Far and away the best part of this rambling affair, those 30 extra minutes feature Miss Sandra riffing on some of her famous pals—her hilarious outing of Rosie O'Donnell is even more outrageous than the treatment O'Donnell gets on *Mad TV*.

In a vivid peek at the making of a television special, Bernhard throws a grand hissy fit when she decides the audience isn't laughing loudly enough. "This is an HBO special, honey, this is not some fun little, tacky little club date," she shouts. She goes on to further berate them into showing some enthusiasm, even if they have to fake it.

Actually, it's easy to see why the audience started out lukewarm. While Bernhard can certainly induce a good laugh when she tells one of her trademark bitchy stories, such moments are far too few. This is not at all a comedy show, but rather the wandering, stream-of-consciousness musings of an angry woman. A real hodgepodge, it includes snippets that are meant to be taken as real life, imaginary conversations, CD reviews and a cautionary drug tale.

Female singers suffer most from her wicked tongue. Bernhard opens with a long rant about



PHOTO BY ROBERT SEBREE

Decidedly *not* how a very pregnant Sandra Bernhard looks in her new video

her friendship-cum-obsession with Courtney Love. Part of the fun is trying to guess what's real. Later on she lights into both Madonna and Mariah Carey with claws fully extended. One of her funnier bits is a mock poem about the Lilith Fair: "I just don't know how much more of these little waifish alternative singers I can take—give me an old-fashioned, sweaty, big-titted bitch of rock and roll!"

Bernhard—who has the moxie to appear in a very sheer dress with almost nothing on underneath while extremely pregnant—is indeed fearless, which is refreshing and appealing. Unfortunately, her fearlessness leads her to offer herself as a singer, which stops the show, but not in a good way. While she has a mimic's ear and sings several songs as various characters, she clearly lacks the pipes of the real deal.

This video is strictly for serious fans.

■ ORIANA GREEN is the Entertainment Editor of Just Out. She has been known to spend entire summer days in the cool haven of the multiplex. Contact her at [oriana@justout.com](mailto:oriana@justout.com).



Michael Douglas (left) as Grady Tripp in *Wonder Boys* takes it in stride when his editor, played by Robert Downey Jr. (right), arrives for the weekend with a towering trans woman

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