

DVD Review

Title: *Down Under Mystery Tour Educational Pack*

Producer: Michael Noonan

Publisher: 2010 Boom-in-Shot Productions, Australia; Distributed by Mental Leap PTY LTD

Cost: Educational pack (5 discs) \$425 Single disc \$29.95 available at <http://www.downundermysterytour.com/>

Reviewer: Martha Guinan, MPH

Down Under Mystery Tour (2009) was conceived as part of Australian director/producer Michael Noonan's doctoral study about disability and comedy, which sought to explore the complex line between "laughing at" and "laughing with". The educational pack, completed in 2010, included Noonan's dissertation and additional materials related to topics created through the film.

The movie itself, *Down Under Mystery Tour*, is a comedy about Malcolm, who wants to create a "good TV show" as he hears there is money in it and does not like what he sees on his TV. He writes a script including his interests, hot babes and mystery, and sends it to several producers. One picks it up and starts to work with Malcolm to get it filmed. As happens to many films, the story alters slightly as the producer inserts her ideas and values. The lead actors are changed from two "hot chicky babes" to two men with disabilities. Malcolm, of course, does not like this and tries to get the actors to quit when he finds he cannot fire them. The movie is charming and funny with some raucous bits that can be off-putting.

Although generally I am not a fan of comedies, I found this movie engaging. Comedians tend to make fun of their shortcomings and these actors did the same without ridiculing themselves. I felt that the movie was true to the disabilities it portrayed. A wide audience should enjoy this movie; however the uncensored sexual comments may earn the film an "R" rating, limiting the potential audience.

Noonan, the director, learned about disabilities when he was first contacted to do a documentary about the adventures of a group of people with disabilities traveling to Egypt. *Unlikely Travellers* (2007) is included in the educational pack and is a delightful film that illustrates the joy the trip brought to the travelers. The group consisted of six people with disabilities and six without. The first half of the movie documents the physical and emotional preparation for the trip to Egypt; the second half focuses on the trip itself and its consequences. This journey is a collective step into the unknown that changed the lives of each of the adventurers. I especially enjoyed this movie as disability issues were presented as matter of fact and did not dwell on limitations or inabilities.

From this foray into disabilities, Noonan got the idea to combine his dissertation with a movie about laughter and disabilities. Comedy was an area Noonan was drawn to, and he thought it would be provocative when combining it with disabilities. Noonan got more than he bargained for when, during his dissertation proposal, two professors protested and publicly

denounced the project as demeaning and exploitive of people with disabilities. This in turn ignited an international media controversy around free speech and censorship.

The educational materials in the pack include lesson plans and video discussions around topics brought up in the film including sexuality and disabilities; attitudes about disability; disability and comedy; and actors playing disability. The lesson plans are well done and the discussions are interesting. The materials are best broken into small segments and tackled individually. This compilation documents and extends the existing knowledge of the field of disability studies as it values the opinions of the people with disabilities involved in the project. While the educational pack is quite pricey for the general population it would be a valuable tool in the disabilities studies classroom.

Martha Guinan, MPH, University of Hawai`i Center on Disability Studies, is a PhD. Student in Exceptionalities at the University of Hawai`i and works for the Center on Disability Studies. She is also the mother of an exceptional young actor named Ryan.