'The Super' is saved by Pesci's effort

By Bob Strauss
Los Angeles Daily News

Film Review

"They brainwashed you, like Patty Hearst," Big Lou Kritski (Vincent Gardenia) bellows at his son Louie (Joe Pesci) when the younger Kritski breaks the first commandment of slumlords and does something right by his tenants.

Big Lou, of course, is the only person in the universe who's surprised by this turn of events. Everything about this broad, offensive comedy is so eminently predictable, even the rats seem bored.

The one saving grace of "The Super" is Pesci's energetic performance. The "GoodFellas" Oscar winner attacks his first starring role with fierce, eclectic glee. Whether Louie is cussing out the world or learning how to line dance, Pesci's every move and attitude bursts with inventive wit.

Too bad nothing else about the movie comes close to doing that. Overreaching TV writer Sam Simon and unfunny comedy director Rod Daniel ("Teen Wolf," "K-9") mix insulting stereotypes of Jewish landlords with insulting stereotypes of poor ethnics for an hour, then toss in some sentimental simplifications about how they can all get along if they really get to know one another.

More specifically, Louie is sentenced to six months in his rotting, Harlem building for housing code violations. The judge expects him to make necessary repairs during that time, but Big Lou — whose millions of dollars worth of other decrepit tenements the son stands to inherit — threatens to cut him off if he fixes so much as a burned-out light bulb.

Of course, the contentious Louie eventually bonds with his once-despised new neighbors, who include a Hispanic street gambler (Ruben Blades) and a troubled black kid (Kenny Blank) in need of a father figure.

There's also an attractive, housing authority lawyer (Madolyn Smith Osborne) who pops up regularly to verbalize the film's already obvious social conscience. To his credit, Louie does nothing but come onto her.

In fact, by keeping Louie nasty, selfish and gloriously unenlightened, Pesci saves the film from otherwise inevitable sappiness. Pesci understood that "The Super" needed to have the sharpest possible bite if its humor or its moral was possibly going to work.

Too bad everyone else involved with the movie was brainwashed by formulaic blandness: It would be less insulting if its spirit were mean instead of just patronizing.

Eric Liebowitz — 20th Century Fox

Joe Pesci stars as slumlord Louie Kritski and Madolyn Smith Osborne is Naomi Bensinger, a Housing Authority lawyer, in the recently released film "The Super."

Magazine is real good for a laugh

By Michael H. Price
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Don't know about you, but I could use a breather from the movies for this brief space.

It's always an eye-opener to take a break from the darkened screening rooms of Dallas —the usual hangouts for a guy who keeps track of Hollywood's output for a living — and even more invigorating to take the occasional look at new artistry in other media.

The fresh voices in this case belong to a humor magazine called Wake Up! Created and published by Arlington-based Win-Mill Productions, the book has a premiere issue just out and sufficient ambition to have begun accepting subscriptions for its thrice-a-year editions: August, December and April.

Wake Up!'s opening shot is a conversation with the three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Jeff MacNelly, illustrated with several of his better drawings. The celebrated political satirist and creator of the newspaper comic strip Shoe speaks with offhandedly genial candor, and the magazine preserves the immediacy of the visit in a Q&A format.

Wake Up! art

Apart from the MacNelly panels, the Wake Up! art is the work of Win-Mill partner Craig Miller, who distinguished the ranks of Texas cartoonists four years ago with a short-lived but splendid comic book called Renegade Rabbit.

Miller's decisive grasp of comics-style narrative is underused here — just one page devoted to a gentle lampoon of hypocrisy in organized religion, plus a surreal single-page comic about a dog's abilities — but he receives a workout in terms of conventional illustration. The center spread is a theoretically workable board game along Monopoly lines, offering the reader a chance to indulge in the perilous glamour of being a rock 'n' roll star.

Miller and co-creator Mark Winter have built Wake Up! on a basis of humor pieces written and drawn primarily to amuse their circle of friends and family. The magazine recycles much of this closely circulated business, taking a refreshing waste-not, want-not attitude that cuts against the grain of many other publications' cynical yes-but-will-it-sell? commercialism.

Teen-agers mobbing teen idol nothing new

By Jenny Vogt
Cox News Service

Just when you think the world's becoming a safer place, 10,000 screaming Florida teenagers mob teen idol Luke Perry of "Beverly Hills, 90210."

Such anarchy is nothing new.

In 1959, Fabian got his fans so overwrought that police had to use fire hoses to cool them down when he appeared at the grand opening of a New Jersey doughnut parlor. And David Cassidy's world tours inspired such mass hysteria that in 1974 a 14-year-old fan suffered a fatal heart attack at a London show.

"I think the main appeal is a certain look, something young girls can fantasize about without feeling too freaked out about like someone with more of an edge," said Pamela Dell, entertainment editor of "'Teen" magazine in Los Angeles, at 34 one of the oldest and biggest teen publications with 1.4 million subscribers.

"It's that horrible American ideal that Prince Charming is going to come along and make your life perfect. . . . It's completely unrealistic, but no one is realistic if they're 14 years old and growing up in this society."

What's happened

Here's what has happened to some of those Prince Charmings over the years:

■ **David Cassidy**: Fifteen years after his last concert tour, David Cassidy is back on the road with new music, a new wife and a new image.

Cassidy, 41, the former cherubic-faced star of "The Partridge Family," is seeking to distinguish his current musical style from the bubble gum rock he played as character Keith Partridge in the hit 1970s television series.

"I was always more of a hippie than Keith was and was genuinely more into a progressive, harder-edged music than he was," Cassidy said in a phone interview. But when asked to describe his current musical style, he said simply, "successful," referring to his 1990 album "David Cassidy, which spawned a Top 40 single, "Lying To Myself."

A lot of people were surprised by how well-received his album was, said Cassidy, who bristles at the "former teen idol" label. "I think for the first time I got real critical acclaim for my writing."

Although Cassidy promises to play some of his old hits such as "I Think I Love You" while on tour, he stresses it is not a nostalgia tour. Still, former "Partridge Family" co-star Danny Bonaduce is opening for Cassidy with a stand-up comedy act at some venues.

"People ask me, 'Why, now that you have this credibility going would you do that (include Bonaduce),' " Cassidy said. "But I have a unique knowledge of how funny he is and he has not disappointed me."

Bonaduce, 32, has been in the news for more than his comedy career. He recently had some scrapes with the law, and was placed on probation in August for beating up a transvestite prostitute in Phoenix.

First trip

Cassidy took his first big image-breaking step in the mid-1970s when he posed for a semi-racy "centerfold" in "Rolling Stone" magazine (the photo was cropped a few inches below his navel). These days, public relations photos show a slightly stubbly face, the formerly full cheeks looking more trim than in the old days.

Cassidy married his writing partner, Sue Shifrin, last year and they have a 7-month-old son, Beau Devin. He is divorced from actress Kay Lenz.

Becoming a dad for the first time, "is the greatest experience I've ever had in my life," Cassidy said. "Now I understand why people go gaga over their kids."

■ **Bobby Sherman**: Bobby Sherman still receives more than 500 fan letters a month.

Not bad for a guy who was propelled to teeny-bopper heartthrob status more than 20 years ago on the hit television show "Here Come The Brides," where he portrayed a shy, stuttering lumberjack in 1870s Seattle. (Back then, he received more than 20,000 letters a month.)

"I didn't stutter in real life, but at the same time I was pretty much a shy person," recalled Sherman, 44, in a phone interview. "I was pretty much to myself, a loner, and I think I've pretty much stayed that way all my life."

The teen idol-cum-loner is back in the spotlight again with the August release of his first greatest hits collection on CD by Restless Records. The package includes four of Sherman's million-selling singles: "Little Woman;" "La La La (If I Had You);" "Julie, Do You Love Me?"; and "Easy Come, Easy Go."

Episodes of "Shindig," the 1960s TV rock show on which Sherman regularly sang and played guitar, also were recently released by Rhino Video, he said.

"It was a tremendous surprise to see it's (the CD) doing very well," Sherman said. "If it continues to do well, there's a lot of talk about going in and cutting a new record." As for acting, he said, he is poised to jump into a sitcom if the right one comes along.

Although he has guest starred on a lot of shows such as "Murder, She Wrote" over the years, Sherman was believed to have retired after the sitcom he starred in, "Getting Together," failed after 13 episodes in 1972.

But he had become interested in the production end of the business, and started directing commercials and scoring music. The work he is most proud of is "The Day The Earth Moved," an ABC movie of the week he produced in 1974. He has done a lot of other production work since then.

Meanwhile, Sherman and his wife, Patricia, had two sons, Christopher, now 18, and Tyler, 17, and Sherman suddenly had the desire to learn first aid for their sake. In the end, he received extensive emergency medical training and now works 12 hours a week as a volunteer paramedic in the San Fernando Valley where he lives. He and his wife were amicably divorced in the late '70s.

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