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The Southland Times

Unwind



Cohen at his best – or worst

US gay activists are worried that comedian Sacha Baron Cohen's new film, *Bruno*, could reinforce negative stereotypes about homosexuals just as they are making gains in the fight for rights such as same-sex marriage.

Cohen, who scored a surprise hit in 2006 with *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, portrays a flamboyant gay Austrian fashion reporter in the new film.

The studio releasing *Bruno* says the film's intent is to satirise homophobia, but some gay advocates are wary.

"We do feel the intentions of the filmmakers are in the right place – satire of this form can unmask homophobia – but at the same time it can heighten people's discomfort with our community," said Rashad Robinson, senior director of media programmes for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

With that in mind, the alliance asked in vain for Universal Pictures, the studio behind *Bruno*, to add a message from Cohen addressing the importance of gay rights and tolerance.

Universal says in a statement it believes most moviegoers will understand the film's "positive intentions".

"*Bruno* uses provocative comedy to powerfully shed light on the absurdity of many kinds of intolerance and ignorance, including homophobia," the studio says.

The movie comes out as US same-sex couples have won the right in six states to wed, amid a fierce debate on gay marriage that has seen California voters approve a ban on such marriages.

Bruno is expected to be a hit, although there remains a big question about whether the young men who make up a core Hollywood audience will turn out for a movie about a gay man.

"It's going to be interesting to see if a bunch of teenage boys actually care to go," gay activist Cathy Renna said.

But one thing is certain – Cohen has a huge fan base. Men and women flocked to *Borat*, a fake documentary about a Kazakh journalist traveling across the United States that used comedy to expose bigotry. It earned US\$128 million (NZ\$206 million) at US and Canadian box offices and \$133 million in other countries.

Like its predecessor, *Bruno* is a mock documentary that covers the fashion reporter after he loses his job in Austria and goes to America looking to become a celebrity.

Bruno wears mesh shirts, talks with a lisp and has a penchant for dropping his pants.

His unscripted encounters with everyday Americans and prominent figures, who think he is real, often devolve into people's disgusted reaction to Bruno's in-your-face sexuality.

In one scene, for instance, a martial arts teacher shows Bruno how to guard against gays. Gay and Lesbian Alliance director Rashad Robinson said another scene worried him that shows Bruno appearing to have sex with a man in a tub, while his adopted baby sits nearby.

"That wasn't really unmasking homophobia, and especially in a country where same-sex couples can still be denied the ability to adopt children that they've raised since birth.

"Trivialising gay families isn't a joke," Robinson said.

But gay groups also see potential from the film.

"Bigotry and homophobia still today get cloaked in many different nuanced ways, so a movie like this has the potential to let everyone in on the joke and to really change the way homophobia is viewed," Human Rights Campaign spokesman Brad Luna said.

Reuters



Fabulous: Sacha Baron Cohen as Bruno
Photo: REUTERS

Lady in white?

MATE
MARK WILSON



IT'S an iconic image – soft skinned, caring face and warm smile, dressed in white with a touch of red and capped off with a name tag and little silver trinket of some sort.

I'm not describing an angel but possibly the nearest thing any of us will ever get to one. Over centuries these creatures have manned life's exit, making one's final weeks, days and hours a more bearable experience with their kindness and angelic charm.

Now with advances in technology, they are part of the team that sends you from the brink, holds your hand and delicately places a lollipop in your mouth after your horrible parents let the horrible doctor ram that horrible needle in your arm or, if you were a skinny wee tyke, in a more fleshy part of the carcass.

Nurses: saviour for some, fantasy for others, pinnacles of society for all. Often under-appreciated by the administration but never by the patient.

I have always had a soft spot for nurses. This could possibly have stemmed from when I was young and broke my leg after being laid out by a ski-mobile up the mountain (which is a story in itself).

Down in the deep dark recesses of that megalith that was Kew hospital, the mothers of a couple of my friends, dressed in majestic white dresses, comforted me through the hard times with soft words and copious quantities of liquid paracetamol.

However, it seems humanity, at least in New Zealand, will be robbed of this image that has nursed us through the darkest hours or handled those awkward fly-in-the-zipper and rash-on-the-bum moments for centuries.

I rocked up to Lakes Hospital the other day to drop off some muffins for the nurses (True story, not just another dolphin trainer story to pick up chicks.) and to my shock the nurses were in blue overalls of some description. Blue!

Blue isn't going to lighten my spirits. It's not going to take my mind off the pain as its wanders off to some fantasy land of even shorter white nurse dresses. What will happen to doctors and nurses parties? Will the costume shops replace white dresses with blue overalls? Will the nurse fantasy be the same when you close your eyes and she skips into your room in blimmin blue overalls? They looked like they were about to grab a wrench, air gun and gallon of oil and hop into a mechanics' pit for the afternoon.

Sure, blue doesn't show the blood and even worse substances. But general ward nurses have a role far bigger than simply wiping bottoms and attending to cuts and scratches – their job is to lift spirits, offer hope and ease pain through their sheer radiant presence. A nurse with a friendly smile, kind words and white is worth more than a litre of morphine.

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