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**FILM**

## BAD SANTA IS COMING TO TOWN!

Maria-Kristina Perez

Just in time for the fifth week blues is this year's festive US import: *Bad Santa*. Those of you still reeling from the sugar-shock of last year's sentimental holiday romp, *Love Actually*, are about to get the antidote.

*Bad Santa* fell down US chimneys last season and those on the other side of the Pond are now bracing themselves to be hit again. But while it remains to be seen if the sequel can live up to the hype, we in the UK can experience the original for the very first time.

Some of you may really not enjoy it – those of you that is, with any childhood illusions still intact about the miracle of Christmas. If you fit into that category, read no further, go straight to Blockbuster on East Road and rent the aforementioned diabetic overload. On the other hand, if you enjoy schadenfreude as much as your lovely reviewer, then run, or in the spirit of *Bad Santa*, stumble drunkenly, to the nearest cinema.

With the Coen Brothers as Executive Producers and wildcard Billy Bob Thornton in the starring role as an alcoholic shopping mall Santa with an even more foul-mouthed elf sidekick, he couldn't care less if you've been naughty or nice. The M.O. of Thornton's Willie and his mini-me is to spend all day asking

snot-faced brats what they want for Christmas, while casing the joint at night for a big score on Christmas Eve that will supply the drinking money for the next year. (You may recognize the pint-sized criminal from the controversial new Eminem video 'Just Lose It' where he reprises the role and the 8Mile player dons the Santa suit. If the film is un-PC enough for Marshall Mathers, then it's gotta be good, right?)

Their game plan is working well for the dysfunctional duo until the security chief at their latest mall, the superbly cast Bernie Mac, figures out their scam and wants a cut. They also have a nervous-nelly

store manager, the late John Ritter, who frets so much about Willie's swearing in front of kids and penchant for extra-large lingerie salesladies that he doesn't have a clue what's going on. There is also Willie's bartender girlfriend who always had a thing for riding Santa's sleigh all the way home...

Now throw into the mix a chubby, picked-on, eight-year-old boy who adopts the belligerent Willie in a misguided search for a father-figure (his own is 'climbing mountains,' i.e. doing time for tax fraud); and Thornton's character grows, if not a heart, then at least a mushroom of a conscience.

# Cambridge

85 Gwydir Street, Cambridge – 01223 361382

# Blue



- ❖ Friendly free house
- ❖ Totally smoke free
- ❖ Good food
- ❖ Local real ales
- ❖ Large beer garden
- ❖ BBQ facilities
- ❖ Party bookings

**Opening times**

Mon-Fri 12pm-2pm  
& 5.30pm-11pm

Saturday 12pm-3pm  
& 5.30pm-11pm

Sunday 12pm-3pm  
& 6pm-10.30pm

*Built in the 1860s to serve the community, the Cambridge Blue remains a neighbourhood pub run by Chris and Debbie Lloyd.*

The black, deadpan humour reaches its climax in the montage sequence where the Phoenix police shoot an unarmed Santa, which ends, or puts on pause (see sequel), Willie's life of crime because of the settlement from his lawsuit against the city. Not your typical happy ending, but sometimes that's as good as it gets. Still, for anyone who would prefer not to see Santa shot in the back by a trigger-happy SWAT team, best to stay home and eat your mince pies. This Santa is bad. Very bad. But sometimes bad is just so, so good.

*Bad Santa is released in cinemas in the UK on November 5, 2004*

**EXHIBIT**

**BRUCE ALMIGHTY**

*The latest in the series of Unilever-sponsored exhibitions at the heart of London's Tate Modern, Bruce Nauman's Raw Materials, is a piece built entirely of sound. Could it be true that the removal of one sense heightens the appreciation of those others still available, asks DAVID GROCOTT?*

Pitted, as they are, against a maelstrom of swirling sound, the crowd enjoying the latest installation in the turbine hall of the Tate Modern have a bit of a struggle on their hands. In what direction should their horn rimmed glasses be pointed? Where should their ears turn? Or is the tannoy system broken?

There are no images, no glass boxes or even, heaven forbid, velvet ropes. The work exists completely in the rather daunting medium of noise. The only visual element, as some observers have already suggested, is the mass of visitors who

mill, in an anxious ballet, around the hall. Purists (and the wise) should approach the hall from the main entrance to the west. Here, the noise confronts one formlessly, like an eroding tide of sound. Loud, in the same way that tectonic plates are powerful, this abstract element remains as the visitor penetrates further into the building. However, from its amorphous enormity, precise streams can be picked out: "THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU".

The sound comes from 22 pairs of speakers that beam differing noises in bands across the floor. Thus, by walking in a straight line from the door forward, one moves from this random din of appreciation to the slightly disappointing "You may not want to be here".

Depending on who you listen to, or which broadsheet you read, Nauman apparently took inspiration from either the electricity sub-station standing adjacent to the building and which provides the building with a faint electric hum; or a group of children in the cavernous hall. Emma Dexter, curator of the Tate Modern: "The Turbine Hall is filled with voices, some clearly audible, others indistinct, which merge with new, 'found' sound from the voices of visitors. In Raw Materials, Nauman has transformed this cavernous space into a metaphor for the world,

echoing to the endless sound of jokes, poems, pleas, greetings, statements and propositions."

Certainly there is a wittiness to the piece, but also a sensation that this is less the "world" of Descartes' physical reality and more an entry into Nauman's mind. Are we here perhaps, like some Arthur Dent figure, suddenly in Nauman's head? "Get out of my mind, get out of this room" one set of speakers growl. And what seems like a poorly recalled memory becomes distinct in front of another: "It was a dark and stormy night. Three men were sitting around a campfire, One of the men said, 'Tell us a story Jack.' And Jack said, 'It was a dark and stormy night. Three men were sitting around a campfire. One of the men said, 'Tell us a story, Jack'"

The effect here, close to the furthest end of the hall, is that this may indeed be the artist's brain at work. After seeing so many people aimlessly wandering about, this is actually rather a pleasing notion: the mind, the world, the dialect of the head and the voices of the world, all operating in some combined operation. However the overall indistinctness of the piece comes hard on the heels of this euphoria and, with a wry smile, reminds one of the disorder in both people's minds and the world. It is with this ultimately rather dark thought that you make

your way past the milling crowd, and leave to join the comparative peace and quiet of London.

*The Unilever Series: Bruce Nauman's Raw Materials runs at the Tate Modern, Bankside, London, 0900-17.40 daily until March 28, 2005. Information on 0207 887 8000.*

