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ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Pals Collide in Comic 'Hit and Runway'

Movie Review

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"Hit and Runway" is a little gem, a sparkling comedy with serious undertones about friendship, self-discovery and artistic integrity. Director Christopher Livingston, who wrote the script with Jeff Cohen, strikes just the right balance between grit and make-believe. First-time feature director Livingston gets terrific performances all around, especially from stars Michael Parducci and Peter Jacobson.

Parducci's Alex Andero is an affable Italian American who works at menial jobs in his family's Greenwich Village restaurant while taking screenwriting classes on the side. Alex is one of those physically powerful guys who've been made to feel dumb all their lives. As a result, he's a bit awkward and hesitant in manner but is nonetheless possessed of tremendous focus and determination. In class he's ridiculed for a story idea—a female agent goes undercover at a fashion show posing as a model—yet its premise is coincidentally quite similar to Sandra Bullock's recent hit, "Miss Congeniality," which found Bullock as an FBI agent going undercover at a beauty pageant.

Alex's self-confidence is therefore at a low ebb when his uncle, a Hollywood industry veteran, tells him he can set him up with a chance to write a script for top action star Jagger Stevens (Hoyt Richards, properly square-jawed—and very funny). Salvation, however, looms in the form of Elliot Springer (Jacobson), a none-too-



JOSH SOLSON

Michael Parducci, left, and Peter Jacobson are an "Odd Couple" pairing of friends in "Hit and Runway."

successful playwright with a sharp wit. Elliot is a small, ordinary-looking man who is Jewish, gay and for whom Hollywood is anathema. He'd rather starve than sell out—or so he says. Alex's proposal that they collaborate seems an absolute no-go—until Elliot realizes that Alex can fix him up with a date with the restaurant's new waiter, Joey (Kerr Smith), an aspiring—and amusingly shallow—actor.

Alex and Elliot are the "Odd Couple" of collaborators. Different in every way, they gradually become attuned to each other, with Elliot nudging Alex into becoming a part of the creative process. They challenge each other until they are actually proud of how their "Hit and Runway" script turns out. Their friendship is put to the test at their all-crucial first meeting, but that's when the fun begins in earnest.

Livingston keeps "Hit and Runway" lively and engaging, and he has fun with the old Hollywood cliché of having his female lead

transform from plain Jane to radiant beauty merely by removing her glasses. Judy Prescott, as a shy screenwriting classmate of Alex's, achieves this change with ease; the only trouble is that Alex is so self-absorbed in his script that it takes a while for him to take proper notice. The film's other key figure is Alex's older brother Frank (John Fiore), a regular guy who runs the restaurant and has never treated Alex with any respect.

Livingston and Cohen have much affection for their characters, and "Hit and Runway" has a warm glow, apt settings and a brisk pace. It leaves one feeling that its happy ending, not at all predictable but with a touch of the wishful thinking that comedy permits, has been well-earned.

• **MPAA rating:** R, for language, sexual content and some violent images. **Times guidelines:** some language, adult themes and situations; suitable for mature older children.

'Hit and Runway'

Michael Parducci..... Alex Andero
Peter Jacobson..... Elliot Springer
Judy Prescott..... Gwen Colton
Kerr Smith..... Joey Worciukowski

A Lot 47 Films presentation of a Mirador Films production. Director Christopher Livingston. Producers Andrew Charas, Chris D'Annibale and Livingston. Screenplay by Jaffe Cohen and Livingston. Cinematographer David Tumblety. Editors Rhonda L. Mittrani, Livingston. Music Frank Piazza. Costumes Jory Adam. Production designer Mark Helmuth. Art director Alex Westerman. Set decorator Laura Roberts. Running time: 1 hour, 41 minutes.

Exclusively at the Sunset 5, 8000 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood, (323) 848-3500; Mann Criterion 6, 1313 Third Street Promenade, Santa Monica, (310) 248-MANN; Edwards University Town Center, 4245 Campus Drive, Irvine, (949) 854-8811; Edwards Rancho Niguel 8, 25471 Rancho Niguel Road, (949) 831-0446.