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DVDs: Is Steve Carell A Movie Star?

Posted October 9, 2007 | 02:36 PM (EST)

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One flop can scare the dickens out of anyone, so with the release this week of Evan Almighty (\$29.98; Universal) I have to ask: is Steve Carell a movie star?

First, he's clearly a talented comic. Carell was great on The Daily Show and against all logic the US version of the absolutely brilliant, impossible to duplicate British sitcom The Office has taken on its own life and become very good on its own terms. (Though the hour-long episodes this season are a drag.) And Carell helped create one vehicle for himself that capitalized on his skills remarkably well: The 40 Year Old Virgin is unthinkable without him.

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So is Evan Almighty just a misstep? The story of a modern day Noah, it's the sort of bloated comedy that Hollywood made in the Sixties, with the concept of our hero grappling with tons and tons of animals creating such logistical nightmares that niceties like story and character development get left by the

wayside.

Indeed, Carell has proven strongest in supporting roles: Brick Tamland in Anchorman: The Legend Of Ron Burgundy, Evan in Bruce Almighty, the depressive gay Proust scholar in Little Miss Sunshine and even the stunt casting of him as Uncle Arthur in the dreadful Bewitched. That's the definition of a supporting actor - someone you love to see come in, do their bit and get off stage. When a supporting actor takes center stage - like Seth Rogen in Knocked Up and perhaps Carell in Evan Almighty - their appeal can wear thin.

But Carell has a lot more chances to prove his leading man mettle. 2008's Get Smart remake seems like ideal casting and obviously in the right comic role he can shine. But how many roles like that are there? (Tell it to Don Knotts - he had a film career in major roles, didn't he?) Carell's real test will be the Peter Hedges comic drama Dan In Real Life, with Juliette Binoche, John Mahoney and Dane Cook. Uh, speaking of guys who don't seem like leading men....

Also out this week: Man Push Cart (\$26.98; Koch Lorber), the acclaimed story of a Pakistani rock star turned New York City street vendor; the second and best season of Family Ties (\$38.99;

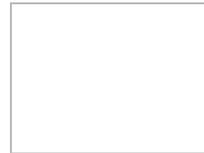
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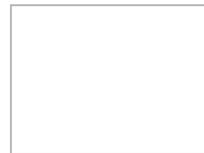
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Paramount), when the show relaxed and accepted the fact that Michael J. Fox was now the star; the absurdly graphic dark horror-comedy *Black Sheep* (\$24.95; Dimension), the funniest horror film since *An American Werewolf in London*; *Emmanuelle* (\$19.98; Lions Gate), the erotica classic that launched a thousand sequels but is never quite as naughty as you hope - which is the secret of its success; Geraldine McEwan in another batch of Miss Marple mysteries *Agatha Christie's Marple Season 3* (\$59.99; Acorn); the documentary *The Forgotten Coast* (\$26.99; Echo Bridge), which follows top surfers to Indonesia and includes the expected jaw-dropping footage; the iconic "old dark house" thriller, 1927's *The Cat and the Canary* (\$24.95; Kino) as well as an all-but-lost British silent thriller *A Cottage On Dartmoor* (\$29.95; Kino) that came out two years later; Ben Kingsley - long removed from his saintly Gandhi aura - playing a drunken assassin in John Dahl's *You Kill Me* (\$19.95; IFC); the droll *12:08 East Of Bucharest* (\$22.95; Tartan) which proves that everyone is a revolutionary after a dictator has fallen; *Meerkat Manor Season One* (\$24.95; Animal Planet) perfect for the family if you don't mind preparing your kids for the cruel reality of nature; the Film Crew throw tomatoes at goofy B movie *The Giant of Marathon* (\$19.99; Shout) in a spin on the MST3K glory days, with some success; Aardman's *Creature Comforts America* (\$29.95; Sony), the droll British series brought across the pond with less brilliant results but quiet appeal intact; and season two of the delightful series *Everybody Hates Chris* (\$38.99; Paramount).

So what do you think: is Steve Carell a movie star or just a good supporting actor that lucked out with the right role in *The 40 Year Old Virgin*? Will you see him in *Get Smart* next year? And are there any other **movie stars** you don't think quite fit the bill?

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don't you think some (if not most) of the blame has to go to the director? and the editor? i've been on movie sets and have seen them have actors do take after take and in the end it is their choice which one makes the cut.

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kkuchenb [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of kkuchenb](#) [permalink](#)

Erm, movie star? No. Carell was best on The Daily Show. The Office was OK for a while but has gotten tired. I haven't liked any of his feature-length comedies. And, seriously, how good can an actor be in a reread of a 1960s or 1970s TV show or movie. These are spreading like a virus now, and from what I've seen, they just aren't any good. Better to watch the originals.

I hope to see him do more actual acting. He was terrific in Little Miss Sunshine.

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Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

The hour long episodes of The Office are definitely not a good thing. There's a reason most comedies are half an hour. (Comic dramas like Ugly Betty are a different beast.)

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ConcernedAboutRFuture [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of ConcernedAboutRFuture](#) [permalink](#)

NO.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 08:24 PM on 10/11/2007

Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Nuff said, I suppose. You get points for both succinctness and making clear that the arguments for either side are perhaps obvious and all one need do is weigh in.

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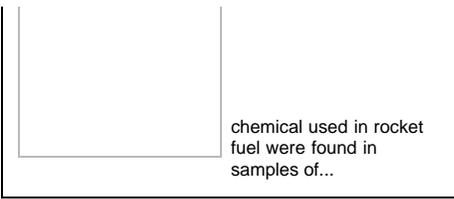
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Despite how they sometimes act, movie stars are humans too. Like all of us "normies," they make mistakes such as the one Steve Carell made when he agreed to be in Evan Almighty.

But is one mistake enough to label somebody, in this case a movie star, a failure? He's a clever and funny guy, something that there really isn't enough. Personally I never saw Evan Almighty but the previews made me want to shout "it's not worth it Steve!"

Many of the typical comic actors in today's movies just act stupid and display the usual potty humor we've all grown accustomed too. Carell, however, displays that sarcastic wit that lacks with other comedy actors such as Will Ferrell. Speaking of Ferrell, he's had a couple of funny movies but if you saw Bewitched or Kicking and Screaming, you might never laugh at him again. Despite these mistakes, Ferrell continues to get headline roles in movies and be widely popular.

Every big movie star was in one, if not several, awful movies as the main character. Not all, but some of them seem to bounce back if they have enough talent. Let's not forget he was in the 40 year old virgin which was popular and really funny. Carell has the talent; he just hasn't been in a well-written movie yet as the big star.
His resume of funny supporting roles in movies, being one of the best Daily Show reporters of all time, and being one of the funniest characters on the Office makes me believe there is still hope for him yet.



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For other comic actors such as Will Ferrell, Dane Cook and Ben Stillar, that's a different story .

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Well, I don't think saying someone is a very talented and funny character actor -- rather than a leading man -- makes them a failure. It just determines the sort of roles they will be best at and what movies they'll be good in. Peter Lorre starred in the masterpiece M and even a detective series, but by and large he was a character actor. The studios used to be filled with gifted actors who came into a movie, did their bit and went, making the film better. But you didn't necessarily want them to take center stage. I like Seth Rogen, for example and enjoyed him mightily on Freaks & Geeks and his many supporting roles but simply don't think he has the range and appeal of a leading man, despite the success of Knocked Up. Ricky Gervais has starred in two sitcoms (one brilliant and one decent) but is he a leading man in the movies? I doubt it (and it's not because of his appearance - leading men can be Robert Redford or Dustin Hoffman). Carell has that range, but where are his talents best suited? If it's in supporting roles, that won't be a sign of failure but just of where his talents best lie.

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buddydave See Profile I'm a Fan of buddydave permalink

You could have said the same thing about Jim Carrey after "The Cable Guy" or Will Ferrell after "Bewitched." One flop does not a successful movie career derail. (And Carrell is far less one-note of a comedic performer than Carrey and Ferrell.)

I disagree with the comment that Carrell is strongest in supporting roles. His two best performances have been leading roles -- "40-Year-Old Virgin" and "The Office."

Despite his "Evan" flop, he's got a good track record for picking successful projects and the versatility to do well in whichever movies he decides to make.

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Well said. I don't think a flop derails a career; it just made me pause and wonder where his talents are best suited. But heading a sitcom (an ensemble sitcom, too I might add) is very different from being a leading man at the movies. Ricky Gervais I imagine will almost always play supporting roles in films. But Carell does have more range than him and I'm sure he'll have more hits.

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hip dibler See Profile I'm a Fan of hip dibler permalink

have you not seen "little miss sunshine"? i think his performance in that alone qualifies him as a movie 'star'.

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Agreed. That performance was brilliant. He managed to be both acidly hilarious and terribly sad simultaneously, without ever being pathetic. The scene in the convenience store with his douchebag ex-boyfriend was pure gold. As good as Alan Arkin was, a Best Supporting Actor Oscar easily could have gone to him.

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I referred to Little Miss Sunshine in my original post and think it's his best work after 40 Year Old Virgin. And that was my point. His best work has come in supporting roles and that might be where his talent is best suited. I think he deserved the oscar more than Arkin, who got a well-deserved career Oscar, I'd say. But you two are making my argument for me. The question is not whether he's talented but whether he'd work better in choice supporting roles like LMS or trying to be a leading man as in Evan Almighty and Get Smart.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:48 PM on 10/13/2007

Apples See Profile I'm a Fan of Apples permalink

I'm in agreement with Michael. As much as I've enjoyed Steve Carrell in supporting roles, I can't think

of him as a bona fide movie star. The jump to lead was way too fast.

Evan Almighty is a perfect case in point. The film wasn't particularly good, it didn't really make sense, but more importantly, Steve Carell didn't have the gravitas to carry the movie. This became all the more evident with scenes he shared with Morgan Freeman. That's not to say he's not talented - Steve Carell is very talented - but the leading man status hasn't worked for him yet. I still think of him as TV, and I'm in that section of movie goers who still make that distinction.

The same with the SNL alumni. For instance, I never thought of Chevy Chase as a big screen actor, probably because most of the Chase films weren't all that good. Same for Dan Ackroyd. Liked him, but not on the big screen. Bill Murray, the most unlikely of talents, was a different story. His resume has enough good material to overcome my TV prejudices.

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Your SNL rundown was very apt. Dan Ackroyd and Chevy Chase had lots of leading roles but really were supporting actors when it came down to it. Bill Murray of course has proven a real leading man. How bout them apples?

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sisterdebm [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of sisterdebm](#) [permalink](#)

I was mildly amused by Steve on The Daily Show. And I grew to like The Office in spite of myself, though it's still not an appointment show. I really don't know if I would call the guy a movie star just yet, but I will tell you this, I adore The 40 Year Old Virgin. It's one of those movies I can't stop watching. Every time it comes on cable, which its at least a couple of times a week, I get caught up in it. Sometimes I can pull myself away, sometimes I can't. There is just something magical about that movie and that cast. They were all perfect. And Steve is ridiculously appealing in it.

I even had an erotic, and very funny, dream about him once. But you could not have paid me to see Evan Almighty because I can spot dreck a mile away. And I'm not convinced about Get Smart either. For one, I loathe the cynical Hollywood remake.

Dan In Real Life, on the other hand, looks really sweet and really funny. If he can make those kinds of films --- the ones that are hilarious but still have heart like T40YOV, he might be a movie star one day.

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Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Thanks for reading and responding. I agree there's a big question mark about Get Smart. It will probably make money but a dumb smart show like that is very tricky to get right on the big screen. He's just such perfect casting that I can't help hoping it will be good.

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Fair enough, but I wouldn't want to compare him to Peter Sellers yet, since Sellers was one of the all time greats. I'm sure the studio hopes Get Smart becomes a franchise too -- it's definitely right in his wheelhouse.

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Chrysofa [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Chrysofa](#) [permalink](#)

Steve Carell is a movie star but with an asterisk. The asterisk leads to the category "Comedian". If any comedian can be considered a movie "star", and if he keeps choosing good roles, he'll get there. He's well on the way now.

Consider other comedians currently on the list of comedic movie stars: Murphy, Sandler, Stiller, etc...all these guys make predominantly funny movies with the occasional serious role to show their depth (A guy like Steve Martin actually has depth but rarely shows it on screen...saves it for his written work instead).

Are they actors with the same modern distinction as, say, Clooney? If the choices normally made by the Academy of Arts and Sciences mean anything, then no. They are regularly ignored come Oscar time. However, they put butts in seats. And at a time when the lunatics truly seem to have taken over the asylum, my \$12.00 usually goes to a guy that can make me laugh rather than a guy that reminds me yet again how screwed up everything is out there.

Carell is on the way to being a full-on star if Get Smart hits. If not, perhaps the Don Knotts comparison

might begin to be appropriate...famous, hard not to recognize, lots of brilliant work, true professional, slam-dunk character actor choice, but something less than "star".

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 **Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Good arguments. And yes, the Oscars do shortchange comics. But if he can play the leading man in comedies and score hits, he's a movie star, just like Stiller and the others. My thought was not that comics aren't as valid stars as George Clooney and Tom Cruise but that Carrel might be better as a supporting actor. When Get Smart grosses \$200 mil, I'll be proved wrong.

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 **Chrysofa** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Chrysofa](#) [permalink](#)

Michael, I entirely agree with you in that he does turn in transcending performances in ensemble casts. From the gut, I'd say Get Smart being a success or not, he should use his ever-growing clout to keep seeking out and producing scripts that do focus on the whole rather than the individual parts. If art is the ultimate goal. I just thought it was important to note that it seems most individuals with true star power can get just about anything made, and with a decent budget, that strikes their fancy just by attaching their name to the project. And it seems there are very, very few comedians on that list. I guess I drifted off onto another definition of "star".

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 **brueso** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of brueso](#) [permalink](#)

I'd define a movie star as someone that puts asses in the seats, and I think that Carrell still does that-aided by '40 Year Old Virgin' and "The Office". It will take longer for the dust to settle as to whether or not he can consistently bring people into the theater. "Evan" might have been mediocre, but then Peter Sellers made scores of comedies that weren't that memorable. I do think Carrell would be better served by keeping some comedy in his work- if he just makes "nice guy" movies like "Dan in Real Life" seems like it might be, he might find his returns tapering off. But I'm sure "Get Smart" will be a big success- and maybe that will be Carrell's franchise role as Inspector Clouseau was for Sellers.

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