

From Civil comedy to a row by rowers

SHORT PACKAGES 1 and 7

The shorts package labeled Short Package No. 1 (although it debuts late in the film festival) features those two comic geniuses, Steven Wright and Tippi Hedren. Huh?

Wright brings his deadpan persona to the big screen in a half-hour short that he wrote, directed, produced, and stars in. "One Soldier" gives Ken Burns's "The Civil War" the poodle-in-the-microwave treatment. Wright's Union soldier — who plays the concertina for a general who decides the fate of thousands — ruminates obsessively about the meaning of life and death. His absurdist observations (he met a fortune teller who told Lincoln he was going to be on the penny) and assertions ("I believe in reincarnation, because I have a lot more woodworking to do") are given rugged settings in a variety of New England locations. The film is a hilarious, chilly shlep into the abyss.

Erstwhile Hitchcock ingenue Hedren is a comic revelation in the breezy "Mulligans!," made by Miles Hood Swarthout. She and Marcia Rodd play southern California widows. The martini-saturated duo tra-

verse the country-club golf course one night because Rodd's husband insisted that she scatter his ashes where he made a hole-in-one. Rodd is good, but it's Hedren who lends "Absolutely Fabulous" verve to the film.

Jason Sklaver's "The Kidnapping of Chris Burden" cleverly imagines an art prank pulled by young artists on a '60s-generation art-rogue, played by Robert Wagner. "Rockin' Good Times" is overly cute; director Daniela Lunkewitz stars as a classy European set up on a blind date with a bad-boy rock star. With "Interlude," Vera Wagman manages to make the ultimate female yuppie wet dream dreary: a blue-collar hunk gets all clingy over a married professional woman after their minor-key motel sex.

Shorts Package 7 has a strong lineup. The title character in the Irish "The Nixer King" is a mechanic who cuts corners, the consequences he damned. He gets his comeuppance in a neat bit of poetic justice. Gerard Murphy riffs on spaghetti westerns as he tells this very funny story. Jason Green's "Aftermath" gets metaphysical with unusual vibrancy. K. Lorrle Manning plays a car crash victim who has a choice between life and death. His wife and friends, who were killed in the crash, try to entice him to go over to the other side. There's a lot of texture in

the details here: Green and his cast make us feel the intimacy among the characters. Sarah Schenck's "Love Potion" is a very modern "Gift of the Magi," incorporating urban angst into a tender romantic portrait.

Mary C. Mazzio's "A Hero for Daisy" is such a rush that it should probably have a warning label. It profiles Olympic rower Chris Ernst, who masterminded the 1976 Yale women's crew protest against the shockingly substandard conditions in which they had to function in com-

parison with the men's crew. Ernst, who went on to become a plumber, is a feisty and fascinating character. But what really propels the film is the way it intersperses, among the talking head interviewees, who trace the evolution of women's athletics since Title IX, shots of Ernst and many other women and girls in action, rowing, running, lifting weights, etc. This is a movie that never stops moving.

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