

## 'Sparks' degrades Dangerfield's work

By JEFF RANDALL  
Film Critic

As one of America's most enduring comic heroes, Rodney Dangerfield has — contrary to his ongoing comic routine — earned a lot of respect.

Films like "Back to School" and "Caddyshack," while by no means cinematic triumphs, highlighted Dangerfield's trademark mugs and one-liners and made the man himself into a cultural icon.

And so we arrive at "Meet Wally Sparks," Dangerfield's first return to the big screen since "Natural Born Killers," and his first comic foray since the forgettable "Ladybugs."

This time around, Dangerfield tackles the issue of trashy tabloid television. And being the common man's comic that he is, Dangerfield does anything but turn his nose up at this oft-reviled TV medium — instead, he celebrates it.

Porn stars, social outcasts and fetish-laden sex fiends parade across the stage of Wally Sparks' (Dangerfield) talk show, much to the horror of Sparks' boss (Burt Reynolds) and the conservative wing of American society, represented by Georgia Gov. Floyd Preston (Stiers).

Threatened with cancellation, Sparks and his crafty producer (Mazar) head for the governor's mansion to produce a show with at least a semblance of worthiness. Instead, they are confronted with more scandal and controversy than they ever could have concocted on their usual sound stage.

The expected hilarity results, with Dangerfield crashing the high-society bash, corrupting the pure yet dimwitted governor's wife (Williams), insulting the upper classes and in the end making everyone realize that he's not such a bad guy after all.

While this formula has worked well for Dangerfield in nearly every one of his past films, this time around it not only seems stale, but also a little too contrived.

In the past, Dangerfield has often played the commoner-turned-high-society-guy, making his intrusions into the elitist institutions of our day (such as country clubs and prestigious universities) a sort of war of the classes, where the good guy (meaning the common man) wins.

But in the role of a cheap and trashy talk show host, Dangerfield's struggle seems less a case of commoner-versus-elitist as it does poor-taste-versus-good-taste, with Dangerfield representing the poorest



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RODNEY DANGERFIELD and Cindy Williams cut a rug in the new comedy "Meet Wally Sparks."

in poor taste.

In addition, Dangerfield's always mildly raunchy humor has been amplified for the '90s, making it into an almost repellent display of below-the-belt tactics and sexist ramblings.

The supporting cast, as usual, plays nothing more than a shallow supporting role, only serving to set up Dangerfield's punch lines and — more often than not — act as the punching bags for his brand of slapstick.

While this comedy does have its occasional funny moments (Dangerfield's one-liners hogging most of them), most of this comedy's efforts fall flat when they try to soar and go under when they aim low.

"Meet Wally Sparks" tries to capture the essence and humor of Dangerfield's past glories, but instead only serves as a pale imitation, putting a serious dent in the respect he has earned with his former work.

### The Facts

**Film:** "Meet Wally Sparks"  
**Director:** Peter Baldwin  
**Stars:** Rodney Dangerfield, David Ogden Stiers, Cindy Williams, Debi Mazar  
**Rating:** R (language, nudity)  
**Grade:** D  
**Five Words:** Respect? Not after this one

(right) HOUNDSTOOTH, a Lincoln band that features a rhythm section of local music veterans — including drummer Casey Kinnan (formerly of the Yard Apes) and bassist Chris Sommerich (formerly of No Left Stone) — perform tonight at Duffy's Tavern, 1412 O St.

(below) LOW GRAVITY BAND, an Iowa City roots-rock band, joins Houndstooth in tonight's 21-and-over show at Duffy's.



COURTESY PHOTO

## Houndstooth, Low Gravity Band put on down-home, feel-good show

By ANN STACK  
Senior Reporter

If you're sick to death of snow and school, try a midweek shot of some smokin' roots rock to take the edge off.

Local boys Houndstooth will headline an evening of stripped-down, good-times rock 'n' roll at Duffy's Tavern, 1412 O St. Playing with them are fellow rockers Low Gravity Band, from Iowa City, Iowa.

Both bands take a remarkably similar approach to their brand of down-home, good-ol'-boys style of rock 'n' roll. They have fun with the music and don't take themselves too seriously — this is not, after all, brain surgery. But don't let the beer glasses on stage, the foot-stompin' and the raucous howls they provoke fool you — these guys are professionals.

For instance, check out the way Houndstooth waxes literary midway through their set, proving that rock stars can be intellectuals. (One may want to overlook the literary selection of choice, however.) Also, check out the way Low Gravity Band (all of whom

have college degrees, speaking of intellect) combines poppy harmonies and heavy hooks while still remaining slaves to the feel-good groove.

Two of the members of Houndstooth are veterans of the Lincoln and Omaha music scene, providing the backbone of the rhythm section. Drummer Casey Kinnan was with the Yard Apes, and bassist Chris Sommerich played with No Left Stone. The band is rounded out by lead guitarist and co-vocalist Dan Kaspari, who complements singer Bryan McBride's acoustic guitar perfectly.

It's a good idea to catch Houndstooth while you still can. Sommerich and McBride will soon be pursuing other interests — namely marriage — and the members will soon head their separate ways.

So while that day looms in the not-so-distant future, Houndstooth will rock their hearts out in the meantime.

You can catch Houndstooth with Low Gravity Band tonight at Duffy's. Low Gravity Band will take the stage about 10, followed by Houndstooth. There's a \$3 cover charge.



COURTESY PHOTO

## Lively comedies score big points in video stores

By GERRY BELTZ  
Film Critic

Take this week's two new releases, mixed with one small apology ("Bambi" comes out this week, not last week as reported. Sorry about that!), and garnish with a pick-of-the-week that's great for young and old alike.

"Jack" (PG) — Robin Williams acting like a second-grader? Nah, he could never pull that off!

(sarcastic mode off)

Jack (Williams) is actually only 10 years old, but suffers from a rare disorder that causes his body to age at four times the normal rate. Still, he enrolls in grade school with somewhat predictable results.

Both funny and heart warming, "Jack" makes for a wonderful rental to catch with a loved one, a blanket and a couple of mugs of hot cocoa.

"Bogus" (PG) — Yet another Whoopi Goldberg flick that just didn't do very well at the box office.

Seven-year-old Albert (Haley Joel Osment, "Forrest Gump") loses his mother, so he is forced to go live with Harriet (Whoopi) until things can be sorted out.

Unfortunately, Harriet is about as helpful as steel wool underwear, but Albert's imaginary friend Bogus (Gerard Depardieu) entertains Albert and helps both him and Harriet straighten out their lives.

Roll the dice on this one, but the odds are iffy.

**PICK-OF-THE-WEEK** — Leonard Nimoy took off his Vulcan ears to step behind the camera and direct the hilarious comedy "Three Men and a Cradle."

The movie stars Ted Danson, Steve Guttenberg and Tom Selleck as three happy-go-lucky bachelors who find their lives turned upside-down with the surprise arrival of a baby on their penthouse doorstep.

This one's a hoot from start to finish. Check it out.