

Plympton's latest film fun but flawed

MOVIE REVIEW | HAIR HIGH

by Lena Ross

Since the days of my youth spent in front of a television blaring reruns of *Inspector Gadget*, I've become a diehard animation addict. And my enthusiasm runs deep. When I discovered the unique brilliance of Bill Plympton's independent animation six years ago at *Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Animation Festival*, I was hooked.

In addition to many short films, Plympton has also created a couple of feature-length films, including *I Married a Strange Person* (my personal favourite) and *The Tune*, which was nominated for an award at the Sundance Film Festival and has the distinction of being the first full-length animated feature hand-drawn by one person. In Plympton's trademark eccentric style, his latest film—*Hair High*—relies on spoofing the irksome quality of stereotypes to drive a plot that twists and turns from banal cliché to twisted comedy.

The story takes place at Echo Lake High, a place all too familiar with its romantic '50s high school setting.

But in Plympton's surreal universe, the students' hair reaches aggrandized heights, with the biggest hair belonging to Echo Lake's most prestigious couple—Rod the quarterback and Cherri the head cheerleader.

On the first day of school, Spud, the brainy new kid, taps his tiny scooter into Rod's massive muscle car, causing a tiny flake of paint to come fluttering to the ground. He then embarrasses Cherri in front of (gasp!) an entire classroom and is sentenced by Rod to be her "slave," carrying her books home for her and helping her cheat in biology. Not taking any turns to the unexpected, Spud and Cherri eventually fall in love with flowers blooming up around them when they first kiss. Spud then asks Cherri to the prom and she accepts.

On the way there, as flowers bloom in the wake of their car, they are chased off the road by a jealous Rod and end up at the bottom of Echo Lake. A year later, the lovers return from the depths, skeletal and decomposing, with beautiful, streaming hair billowing among the reeds as they start up the car and drive out of the lake to reclaim their

rightful titles of prom king and queen.

Though the plot is dishearteningly unoriginal when compared to his earlier work, Plympton throws in enough grotesque and eccentric twists to warrant our attention. For example, to the tune of lighthearted music, the smoking biology teacher coughs up his internal organs and the kids have to use their knowledge of biology to get them back in.

This scene is an example of the animator at his best. His recurring motif of the disintegration and deconstruction of the human body parodies the seriousness with which we all take ourselves and the ways in which we primp, sexualize and stereotype ourselves.

Overall, *Hair High* does not live up to the heights of Plympton's other work. His plot for *I Married a Strange Person* was far superior in its imaginative quality. Though *Hair High* is a humorous and entertaining piece of adult animation, it fails to say much about anything save the hackneyed declaration that love conquers all. The story for *Hair High*, having taken over three years to complete, has emerged as tired as Plympton himself must be.



PROVIDED PHOTO

Rod and a skeletal Spud swap fluids, and organs, at the prom.