

## ‘The Happytime Murders’ Shoots Its Wad Too Early

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 24, 2018 - 3:46pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The most noteworthy feature of the puppet-noir comedy “The Happytime Murders” is its use of felt and fluff for nefarious ends, and while that’s not exactly new, there’s no reason it shouldn’t work. But the movie shoots its wad early, and doesn’t have much imagination after that beyond turning silly string into a bodily fluid.

So once you’ve seen the puppets drinking, smoking, watching porn, doing drugs and having violent puppet sex, there’s not much else left. In a parallel world occupied by humans and puppets, the story centers on a former puppet police detective turned private dick named Phil (voiced by puppeteer Bill Baretta), who is investigating the murders of the cast members of a hit puppet TV show called “The Happytime Gang” ... and his brother is one of the dead cast members. To solve the case, he’s forced to re-team with his former partner Connie, played by Melissa McCarthy.



Partners Phil (Puppeteer Bill Baretta) and Connie (Melissa McCarthy) in ‘The Happytime Murders’

*Photo credit: STX Entertainment*

But things that sound funny on paper, land strangely flat here. Skid row is actually a sugar den, with puppets doing lines of pixie sticks like cocaine, and chugging maple syrup straight from the bottle. As depicted, they don’t add up to any actual laughs beyond the slightest of smiles



of recognition. There are a few half-hearted attempts at social commentary on racism, but they pop up almost randomly and are discarded as quickly as they appear.

I've written at length about Melissa McCarthy's almost superhuman ability to find laughs in the rockiest of soils, and in "The Happytime Murders" she manages to squeeze a few chuckles from the stones she's given in the script. Yet even her much derided vehicle "The Boss" had more out and out laughs than this does. This film spends too much time on its actual procedural elements, and doesn't have another gear beyond its most juvenile-puppet-porn level. There are flashes of the movie it could have been, with one puppet receiving a brutal death as a chew toy, and another being all washed up (literally), but all that is few and far between.



Elizabeth Banks and the TV Gang in 'The Happytime Murders'  
Photo credit: STX Entertainment

While the film is the brainchild and directed by Jim Henson's son Brian, the puppets here are notable mostly for how unrelentingly ugly they look. J. Henson's Muppets may have been kiddie stars, but they had the extra levels that pitched to adults. These puppets look a little like the Community Access Cable TV version of The Muppets, with a total and complete lack of personality. It all adds up to a tedious torture, even though the running time was under 80 minutes.

*"The Happytime Murders" opens everywhere in on August 24th. Featuring Melissa McCarthy, Maya Rudolph, Joel McHale, Elizabeth Banks, and the voices of Bill Baretta, Dorien Davies and Kevin Clash. Written by Todd Berger. Directed by Brian Henson. Rated "R"*



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