



Veber dishes up another farce gem



FILM

A Pain in the Ass ★★★★★
 Directed by Francis Veber
 Richard Berry, Patrick Timsit
 Review: Ron Banks

Francis Veber, famed for his French farces involving odd couple mature-aged men, is back at the top of his form in the very funny *A Pain in the Ass*.

The film is sure to be a success with Festival audiences who can recall Veber's comic gems in *The Dinner Game*, *The Closet*, *Tais-toil* and *The Valet*.

In this latest version of odd couplings, Richard Berry — who looks incredibly like Javier Bardem, the villain in *No Country for Old Men* — plays a similarly single-minded assassin holed up in a Nice hotel with a view overlooking the courthouse. His character, who takes the false name Ralf Milan, has been hired to take out an important prosecution witness in a high-security court case that will lift the lid on government corruption and send important people to jail.

The notoriety of the case has attracted a big media contingent, and in the next hotel room is photographer Francois Pignon (Patrick Timsit), who is more intent on suicide than taking shots of the courtroom drama about to unfold.

His wife has left him for her psychiatrist and is living in Nice with her new fellow — a suitable excuse for ending it all, as far as Francois is concerned. But in the best bumbling tradition of French farce, Francois fails in his attempt when the bathroom ceiling caves in, alerting the concierge downstairs to

serious disturbances in his hotel.

With a connecting door to the rooms, the would-be assassin is sucked into the failed suicide drama,

with devastating results for his own aim of firing off a decent shot at the star witness when he arrives at the courtroom entrance.

There is a disastrous case of mistaken identity when the psychiatrist who has run off with the wife turns up to administer a sedative to the disturbed hotel guest.

All the elements of farce are grafted into the plot, from physical elements such as opening and closing hotel doors and a steel shutter with a mind of its own, to delicious little character studies of people unwittingly sucked into this vortex of chaos.

There are scenes, for instance, of the witness on his way to the court becoming ill in the van and the problems of a scooter rider who has stolen his vehicle and thinks the police are chasing him. It's all very deftly handled and the screw-ups add to the film's delicious sense of mounting chaos.

Timsit is suitably sad-faced and spectacularly incompetent as the loser husband Francois (the pain in the ass of the title),

while Berry's villain gradually dissolves into a quivering wreck when he is inadvertently the recipient of a sedative drug.

Pascal Elbe as the smug psychiatrist is just the kind of medico you love to hate and the gorgeous Virginie Ledoyen as Francois' former wife is the chic bitch that only the French can

invent.

A Pain in the Ass is as expertly plotted as any of Veber's other farces and is probably even funnier than some of its predecessors in the genre.

Interestingly, it was originally made in 1973 from Veber's script with a different director and many of its elements were used in Billy Wilder's 1981 comedy *Buddy Buddy*.

None of this matters, of course, because even if it is a remake, the film still stands out for its superb comic moments and non-stop invention.

A Pain in the Ass is at the Somerville until March 15 and at Joondalup Pines from March 16-22.



Pain killer: Richard Berry.