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BEACH BOYS: *Thomas Ian Nicholas, Jason Biggs, Seann William Scott and Chris Klein return for "American Pie 2," from Universal.*

AMERICAN PIE 2

A Universal Pictures release and presentation of a Zide/Perry-Liveplanet production. Produced by Warren Zide, Craig Perry, Chris Moore. Executive producers, Adam Herz, Paul Weitz, Chris Weitz. Co-producers, Jane Bartelme, Chris Bender.

Directed by J.B. Rogers. Screenplay, Adam Herz; story, David H. Steinberg, Herz; based on characters created by Herz. Camera (Deluxe color, Panavision wide-screen), Mark Irwin; editors, Larry Madaras, Stuart Pappe; music, David Lawrence; music supervisors, Gary Jones, Dave Jordan; production designer, Richard Toyon; art director, Kitty Doris-Bates; set designers, Drew Kinney, Betty Krul, Kenneth Larson; set decorator, Karen Agresti; costume designer, Alexandra Welker; sound (Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS), Stephen A. Tibbo, Jonathan Earl Stein; supervising sound editor, Richard Legrand; associate producer, Stefan Frank; assistant director, Marco E. Black; second unit camera, Rick Barker; casting, Joseph Middleton, Michelle Morris Gertz. Reviewed at Avco Center Cinemas, Westwood, Aug. 8, 2001. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 105 MIN.

Jim Jason Biggs
Nadia Shannon Elizabeth
Michelle Alyson Hannigan
Oz Chris Klein
Jessica Natasha Lyonne
Kevin Thomas Ian Nicholas
Vicky Tara Reid
Stifler Seann William Scott
Heather Mena Suvari
Finch Eddie Kaye Thomas
Jim's Dad Eugene Levy
Sherman Chris Owen
Danielle Denise Faye
Amber Lisa Arturo
John John Cho
Stifler's Brother Eli Marienthal
Kevin's Brother Casey Affleck

By ROBERT KOEHLER

There's no pastry in sight in "American Pie 2," but otherwise, the second serving is — not surprisingly — identical to the first. Less a movie than another efficient moneymaking machine for Universal Pictures, pic takes up the comedy saga of five hormonally obsessed buddies' ongoing sexual education as they finish their freshman year in college. Repetition is what "Pie" fans want, and what they get, but a shrewd commercial strategy begets — unlike, for example, "Rush Hour 2" — a remarkably boring comedy. Nonetheless, the just-established August B.O. record by the Jackie Chan/Chris Tucker hit could immediately fall as this franchise, with an R rating or not, continues to roll on, and on, and on, until these kids finally grow up.

Adam Herz's new script is like a schematic drawing in which you can trace the direct links between the, so to speak, highlights of the first movie and the second. Instead of a pie, Jason Biggs' nervous-in-the-sack Jim now gets super adhesive glue. In-

stead of sex play broadcast over the Internet, it's now broadcast over walkie-talkie radios.

And instead of Eugene Levy as Jim's well-meaning but hopelessly square dad walking in on Jim pleasuring himself, he now walks in on Jim doing it with a gal in his dorm room. This opening scene has already been made so familiar by the mass-saturated theatrical and TV trailers that its effect is worn down to the nub.

Director J.B. Rogers seems to have studied the first film, for which he did the a.d. chores, with religious devotion: His camera moves and placements are as obediently plain-wrap in style as the previous pic, and it seems that much of the early party scene hosted by wild man Stifler (Seann William Scott) is shot-for-shot identical to the Stifler party scene in the original "Pie."

After Stifler's noisy shindig is shut down by the cops, Jim and the guys — Stifler, Oz (Chris Klein), Kevin (Thomas Ian Nicholas) and Finch (Eddie Kaye Thomas) — have to look elsewhere for a pad, and Kevin's older brother (Casey Affleck) has just the place: A lovely gabled Michigan lakeside home.

Ensconced in the great digs for the summer, the guys take on house-painting to pay the rent. Jim has had a call from Nadia (Shannon Elizabeth) saying that she'll be visiting him later in the summer, and already he's worked up about it. Oz has had to say goodbye to Heather (Mena Suvari), who's off to a study project in Barcelona. Finch's adventures with Asian women have gotten him deeply into Eastern meditation and sexual practice, a rich font of comedy that the movie oddly never explores. Kevin's encounter with ex-g.f. Vicky (Tara Reid) is "as comfortable as a high colonic in Tijuana," notes always removed observer Jessica (Natasha Lyonne).

Jim, as before, gets most of the long comedy scenes. To get love advice before Nadia arrives, he hunts down his high school prom date and chirpy flautist Michelle (Alyson Hannigan), who's studying at the Tall Oaks band camp. He ends up, in as hamfisted a comic bit as anything this summer, performing on trumpet to an outdoor amphitheater audience. Later, in a pallid knockoff of Ben Stiller's spectacularly painful bathroom scene in "There's Something About Mary," Jim grabs the glue rather than the lube for some solo bedtime action.

In a scene so infinitely long that Jim must actually share screen time with others, Stifler is sure that the occupants of the house they're painting are lesbians. Always led by what's below the belt, he busts into their place to check out the love den, with Jim and Finch joining him. They're caught,

though, when the women (Denise Faye, Lisa Arturo) return. For all of "Pie's" reputed raunch, it's amazing to notice what business it shies away from this time, as if it were as ratings-phobic as its PG-13 competition. The setup for some hairy stuff is all there when Jim, whose privates are swollen from his one-night-stand with the glue, discovers that Nadia has arrived early, but nothing really happens. Not even a last-minute arrival by Stifler's mom (Jennifer Coolidge, in an uncredited cameo) can heat up the pic, though it does wonders for the grateful Finch.

Part of the pic's softness comes from a lack of genuine testosterone-driven energy by the central male ensemble, led by Biggs, who is not getting any funnier with each lead role. Though he may provide a likable, innocent rooting interest in contrast to the subhuman Stifler, Biggs tends to confuse being charming with being pathetic. He's the face of today's young American male insecurity, and it's not pretty.

Thomas emerges out of the crowd with the same droll style he showed before, with more screen time for the sequel. That's also true for Hannigan, who has one of the goofiest faces in movies since Louise Lasser and certainly has no match in this ensemble for original comic chops.

Circulating, as usual, in his own parental universe, Levy briefly reprises his shtick. The rest of the cast fades into the wallpaper of the summer house, nicely designed by Richard Toyon.

Pic is technically a clone of the first, lensed as bright and as flat as possible. Once again, too, the soundtrack is generally a train of the bland pop-punk song leading the bland.