BUELLER? BUELLER? A COLLEGE COURSE ON JOHN HUGHES

Students at L.A.’s USC film school can now get credit for analyzing the work of the ‘80s teen-angst maestro.

By Anthony Breznican

The guy who made an entire movie about the joys of skipping school is now part of the curriculum. This semester, the University of Southern California in Los Angeles began offering “The Genius of John Hughes,” a course devoted to the late auteur of “his teen life, with a slyly humorous coming-of-age classics like Ferris Bueller’s Day Off, The Breakfast Club, and Sixteen Candles. An instant hit with students—enrollment topped out at 98—the class became a sort of pop culture archaeology experiment, excavating long-hidden secrets about some of Hughes’ most beloved movies.

On the February evening we attended class, no less a Hughes authority than the filmmaker’s inspiration herself, Molly Ringwald, did the excavating, showing up as a guest lecturer. “John was really easy to talk to,” she told an audience of rapt students. “There weren’t many adults I really connected with. He was kind of a big kid.” With a nervous laugh, she added, “I don’t know if I would have gotten along with him as an adult.”

So how did the Hughes oeuvre land a spot at USC’s film school, renowned as one of the best in the country? The professor explains. “There’s always a moment where his film stops and deals with real emotion. It’s not just about making you laugh. You really feel something.” The assignments reflected this course objective: Essay topics included “Fathers in John Hughes” and “Women in John Hughes,” with options to turn in short stories or scripts inspired by some of the discussions of the films. Speaking about her former collaborator, even decades later, stirred up emotions for Ringwald. After class, the actress acknowledged how strange it was to see part of her life presented as history. “I have to say, unequivocally, yes, it is,” she said, biting her lip before breaking into a laugh. As for how the notoriously private Hughes might have felt about being canonized in the classroom, a place his characters so rarely avoided, Ringwald said, “I don’t think he would be horrified. He’d be surprised. And very pleased.”