

With 'Murder by Death'

Simon proves screenwriting ability

By REBECCA SCHMIDT

Start off with five wildly caricatured versions of fictionland's best detectives. Add one blind butler and one nonbeliever.

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speaking, reading, maid named Yetta Sprinkle in a touch of thoroughly unmovable murder.
Then dump the whole thing into Neil Simon's major blender. It comes out a funny, slick, recipe-perfect Simon called 'Murder by Death'.
Authoring his first film screenplay, Simon has come up with a plot that goes roughly as follows:
Millionaire prankster Laurel Tuman—no speech impediment intended—receives five recovered sleuths to his suitably isolated and fog-embowered estate for dinner and a murder.
The guests include gumbler Sam Dumont and his blonde companion (Peter Falk and Eileen Brennan); Japan's number one private detective Peter Wang (Peter Sellers); a well-known Belgian master detective and gourmet James Coco;

The Reel Story

an aging and tweedy British lady named Mrs. Eliza Lanchester and the ever-classy Dick and Dora Charleston (David Niven and Maggie Smith) ably assisted, as always, by a bouxy wire-haired terrier called, you guessed it, Myron.

THEIR BATHERS unorthodox host, Truman Capote in his screen debut, offers \$1 million to the crime solver who can meet the challenge of a host prepared murder.

He then departs, leaving his little party to take care of a blind butler (Alec Guinness) and a dead-mute domestic (Nancy Walker). A murder of two occurs and the scramble is on for the solution and the true money.

More of the storyline need not be revealed because 'Murder by Death' is a genuine case of having to see it to believe it. And enjoy it.

The cast is a sparkling combination that has to include at least one of everybody's favorites. Running the gamut from movie royalty such as Alec Guinness and Maggie Smith to the low down cat heron (Nancy Walker) and Eliza Lanchester, the producer hasn't missed a chance at blanket appeal.

Acting wise, the group is too knowledgeable and fast on its collective feet to have fun turning in good performances. Even Capote, who can hardly look forward to a lengthy career in films, is in the right place at the right time for the pivotal role of deranged Laurel Tuman.

THERE ARE, of course, standouts—three of them. James Coco is consummate character actor who does enjoyable justice to the role of the Belgian detective, Coco last seen on the ill-fated 'Dungeons' television series, has the rare knack of making zanyness palatable without giving you indigestion.

In an interestingly out-of-form appearance, Alec Guinness does a super job as the butler. Given the laugh possibilities for situations involving the idea of a blind butler, Guinness has his man smoothly and comically under control.

Maggie Smith is total sophistication and understatement playing a character that bears an uncanny resemblance to a lady known in fiction, films and television as

Nora Charles. Beautiful as always, Ms. Smith's casual, regal bearing and style serve perfectly.

Director Robert Moore has successfully combined the talents of his cast into an even and well-paced two hour. But then, he didn't really have much choice making a good film when he started off with a script provided by Neil Simon.

Proving repeatedly with his Broadway successes that he has discovered the magic formula for generating laughter, Simon has adroitly transferred his ability to a new medium. He says hello to the movie business with a story that is even, very funny and cleverly plotted.

Just off his engagement at the Americana Complex, the film will be in Southfield quite a while judging by audience enthusiasm.

Though we're never really sure whether the butler did it, right or wrong, 'Murder by Death' lives up to two show business traditions: Neil Simon and cast have not only left them laughing, but also left them wanting more.

Spontelli tours

Marcia A. Spontelli, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Spontelli of 2824 Oak Point Dr., Farmington Hills, will be attending Grand Valley State College summer program in Tours, France.

The French language literature and civilization will be the subject of study as well as the opportunities to tour France on the weekends.

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Feds didn't OK highway funds

A statement made by a state highway commission spokesman last week stunned members of the citizens advisory committee of the proposed Northwestern Highway extension, according to Concerned Citizens for West Bloomfield (CCWB) President Sheila Ostley.

Mrs. Ostley said G. Robert Adams told the 11 committee members that no federal funding is now or has been considered for their proposed extension.

"It was a bombshell when he told us it was to be strictly a state project," said Mrs. Ostley. "When we asked why we were there working on a federally required environmental impact statement, he told us it was in case federal revenue ever applied for."

The committee, Mrs. Ostley said, voted on two important issues with both votes failed at 18-4, although not by the same voters.

COMMERCE TOWNSHIP and the Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce had asked to be included with representation on the citizens advisory board but were turned down.

The committee did vote to recommend enlarging the area of study as the why from Telegraph in Southfield to Flint so more alternatives could be included, Mrs. Ostley said.

The contract between the Oakland County Road Commission and the highway department, unimplemented for 25 years, calls for the proposed extension to terminate at U.S. 24 in Holly, but neither body has talked extending a beyond M-73 in Commerce Township, saying it could be negotiated.


It has been three years since citizens groups lobbied the plans for the extension and demanded an environmental impact study.

"Just last fall the Michigan Court of Appeals dismissed the road commission's suit to force the building of the extension."

In June the Michigan Supreme Court ruled the lower court must hear a case which several resident groups are seeking to enter with the highway department which is the plaintiff.

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