The Movies

LOUISE SNIDER

'Silver Streak' makes tracks

Why is it that movies about people on trains are always so much more interesting, so much more classy, than movies about people on airplanes?

Maybe it's that hint of bygone luxury—the private stateroom, the silverware and china of the dining car, and the contempt for jet age time.

Whatever it is, the roar of airplane engines and the rock and roll of a ship just can't beat the rhythm of the rails. To wit: think back to "Murder on the Orient Express" or "The Lady Vanishes." "Silver Streak" (PG) carries on this fine tradition. In fact, it lays new tracks.

THIS MOVIE LIVES UP to its advertisements. It really is a comedy-suspense thriller—terrific entertainment.

Elegance ranked among the reasons for its success is the superb casting. Each actor hits exactly the right note in defining his character. The excellent acting, gorgeous photography (including beautiful panoramic views of the American West) and unusual situations keep this movie snapping along from its tongue-in-cheek beginning to its smash ending.

Gene Wilder as George Caldwell, editor for a publishing house, is perfect as the innocent bystander caught up in art smuggling, murder and mayhem.

He takes the Silver Streak from Los Angeles to Chicago so he can read and be bored. This announcement at the beginning does us that these two things will never happen. He gets seduced, clobbered, chased, shot, hunted by the police and thrown off the train—three times! (Well, twice really; once he's forced to jump.)

Jill Clayburgh is Hilda Burns, a lithe and horny secretary to an art historian. She has the compartment adjoining George's. They've only a broken lock between them and, sometimes, less than that.

FOR ANYONE out of Dr. Dentons, the scene between George and Hilda when they make love while discussion gardening, tomato gardening books and sex manuals has to be one of the most memorable movie sedatives.

The promise of an X rated train ride to Chicago is abruptly denied when George becomes witness to a murder. You know it hell will break loose then, and it does. It emanates from the evil, calm presence of Patrick McGoohan as the villain, Roger Devereaux. His flawless grooming, impeccable diction and suave manners belie how ruthless and cunning he is.

Devereaux has made a bundle with forged paintings and false antiques. He has Hildy's employer killed because the professor was going to expose his activities. The evidence that would substantiate the charges consists of original letters written by the 17th century Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn.

The professor had the letters, and in the frantic search for them two other people get killed, and George gets tossed off the train. He reaches the office of a hick sheriff, but the sheriff is completely bedeviled by George's account of events. When he hears about the Rembrandt letters, he asks, "Who's Rembrandt?"

"Rembrandt's dead," answers George. "Who killed Rembrandt?" gasps the sheriff, mentally adding still another murder to the tally.

During one of his forced exits from the train, George steals a police car wherein he meets Richard Pryor, on his way to the slammer for indulging in a little free enterprise. Pryor picks up, and often steals, every scene in which he appears. As Grover Mulhoney, his brashness and street savvy are the perfect foils for George's middle-class innocence. Pryor and Wilder together have to be two of the most winsome personalities on the screen.

And win they do—with the help of federal agents. They eventually get back on the train, then off again—sort of. It's all in a good cause, an inventive and spectacular smash ending that does the special effects department proud.

GLIMPSES

NEW RELEASES

BUGSY MALONE (G). Gangster musical starring all kid cast. They sing, they dance, they are tikes! guns and showgirls and their average age is 12. A novel idea some people find amazing.

CAR WASH (PG). A day in the life of a car wash with a spirited cast of characters and anal jokes. The large ensemble includes Richard Pryor, the Pointer Sisters and George Carlin.

CARRIE (R). Sissy Spacek plays Carrie, a teenage girl with the power of telekinesis—the ability to move objects by psychic power. She leads a terrifying revenge on the one who offend her.

COUSIN, COUSINE (R). A delightful romantic comedy enacted by a French cast and that sparkling cast. The mature lovers conduct their mayhem against a lively background of family action.

FROM NOON TILL THREE (PG). A different kind of role for Charles Bronson as a not-too-bright but not-too-dumb outlaw who'd rather give up with a widow than get shot up with his gang. Jill Ireland is the widow. Some funny twists in this unusual western.

KING KONG (PG). The big ape is back again with his same old destructive but sensitive personality. Jessica Lange plays the love in his life. Revised version with some tongue-in-cheek dialogue.

MARATHON MAN (R). A spy thriller which overwhelms a terrific cast with a surfeit of blood and violence. Laurence Olivier, Dustin Hoffman, William Devane and Roy Scheider give it their best.

NETWORK (R). Farce satire attacking the television industry and mass media generally. Top performances by Peter Finch, Faye Dunaway and William Holden in fast paced, grimly humorous film.

THE PINK PANTHER STRIKES AGAIN (PG). More clowning with Inspector Clouseau (Peter Sellers) who fumbles his way to victory. This time against the demented ex-police chief who would destroy the world unless the world delivers Clouseau to him, dead or alive.

SMALL CHANGE (PG). French director Francois Truffaut celebrates childhood in this uncommonly good movie about children and the special quality of their lives. "Small Change" makes sense.

THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME (PG). Film of the 1973 Led Zeppelin Madison Square Garden concert in stereophonic sound. Includes scenes of band members' antics, fantasies and personal lives.

STAY HUNGRY (R). Jeff Bridges trying to get his head together, meets others just trying to get ahead in the world of body building and real estate deals. Disjointed but interesting movie.

TWO-MINUTE WARNING (R). All the action isn't at the line of scrimmage when a mad sniper starts picking off the crowd at a packed football stadium. Charlton Heston, natch, takes command.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.

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