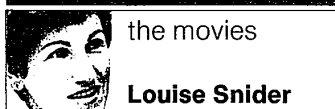


what's at the movies



Dustin Hoffman is in the running for an Academy Award nomination for his role as a divorced father who takes on the responsibility of a son, played by Justin Henry, in "Kramer vs. Kramer."



the movies

Louise Snider

Top-rated film suffering from pseudo-honesty

One of the films that appears on the top 10 lists, and with good reason, is "Kramer vs. Kramer" (reviewed here Dec. 31).

Were I to compile a top 10 list, it would certainly be on mine. Outstanding performances, astute direction, a story that touches the lives of the audience, a contemporary social issue (divorce and an ensuing custody case), unique perceptions of everyday situations — all these are among its considerable merits.

However, "Kramer vs. Kramer" does have one quality which, in light of the praise it is receiving, does deserve further consideration — it's near-honesty. Near-honesty hooks us because it presents what we would like to think of as an honest statement, but it doesn't go so far as to offend us. Near-honesty lies somewhere between grim reality and palatable assumptions.

"KRAMER VS. KRAMER" scores some fast and undeserved points with audiences by using this approach in several areas. One is in the convenient way it establishes the character of the father (Dustin Hoffman), by making him an art director in the cutthroat world of Madison Avenue advertising agencies. Thus we immediately discern that he is ambitious and competitive.

The Madison Avenue image may be authentic, but it's also a cliché, and a dated one at that, something we might expect in films of the 50s.

Why can't an engineer or a salesman or a plumber be competitive and ambitious? In a film which purports to deal with real life, why is the male lead part of a specialized, east coast glamor industry?

ANOTHER CLICHE the film capitalizes on is the notion of the inept male in the kitchen. An important early sequence shows Hoffman bungling as he prepares French toast for his son and himself.

He tries to scrunch a slice of bread into a coffee cup to moisten it. If he's that dumb, how does he solve problems on the job?

The helpless male in the kitchen is as big a myth as the helpless female with anything mechanical.

His whole plan for managing to look after his son leaves doubts about his common sense. Why doesn't he hire a housekeeper or a babysitter? Why doesn't he take his son to a restaurant once in a while instead of pushing TV dinners on him? He doesn't do these things, because by exaggerating the domestic problems, it makes the character's evolution as a caring father more dramatic and admirable. Unfortunately, it also makes him stupid.

FINALLY, THERE IS the contemporary mystique (Is it becoming a cliché?) of the wife (Meryl Streep) leaving her husband and child in order to find herself. This adds a certain piquant immediacy to the film, as compared to the familiar, dull problems of the female as a single parent.

The film has enough going for it without varnishing the truth. Streep could have found herself without becoming the well-adjusted, loving parent now ensconced in a responsible and very high paying job — pretty good for someone without experience. Hoffman would have been acceptable and believable without being a kitchen clown who evolves into the perfect father. Audiences can handle the unglided truth. They live it every day.



Justin Henry won accolades of his own as the young son torn between mother and father in what may be 1979's top movie.

ALL THAT JAZZ (R). Bob Fosse's rowdy, autobiographical musical about hard-working, hard-living choreographer.

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL (R). Al Pacino is a young trial lawyer dedicated to his profession and profoundly troubled by the legal system.

APOCALYPSE NOW (R). Francis Ford Coppola's epic film of the Vietnam war interwoven with the characters and stunning impact of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness."

AVALANCHE EXPRESS (PG). Adventure-suspense drama about GGB agent defecting to the West. Filmed in Italy and Germany; climactic scene is, you guessed it, avalanche.

BEING THERE. Peter Sellers is a TV-educated economist in satire that pokes fun at our political and social conceits.

BLACK HOLE (PG). Disney's expensive entry into sci-fi, space adventure with strong cast and action story.

CHAPTER TWO (PG). Autobiographical Neil Simon story about a man starting over after death of his wife.

CUBA (R). Sean Connery and Brooke Adams in romantic adventure during last days of Batista regime in Cuba.

THE DEER HUNTER (R). An emotionally gripping and violent film about the lives of three friends from a small steeltown as they are affected by the Vietnam war.

ELECTRIC HORSEMAN (PG). Jane Fonda is a reporter and Robert Redford an ex-rodde champion in satirical romance.

THE EUROPEANS (PG). Exquisite period film of Henry James' witty novel. Leo Rieback is seductive adventurer who returns to New England to seek a secure marriage.

THE FISH THAT SAVED PITTSBURGH (PG). Actors and pro-athletes abound in comedy about a water boy who revitalizes a slumping basketball team.

GOING IN STYLE (PG). Offbeat comedy about three pensioners who decide to "go in style."

HOT STUFF (PG). Dom DeLuise directed and stars in slick comedy about undercover police fencing operation.

THE IN-LAWS (PG). Hilarious comedy with Peter Falk and Alan Arkin as near-relatives who not only plan a wedding but ripoff the U.S. Mint.

THE JERK (R). Steve Martin in comedy about a white boy raised by black sharecroppers.

KRAMER VS. KRAMER (PG). Perceptive, well-acted drama about a broken marriage and a custody battle. Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep star.

LOST AND FOUND (PG). George Segal and Glenda Jackson are paired again in romantic comedy about a "fractured" couple who meet in the Swiss Alps and decide to yodel on through life together.

LUNA (R). Uneasy and self-conscious film of widowed opera singer (Jill Clayburgh) in incestuous relationship with her teenage son.

THE MAIN EVENT (PG). Barbara Streisand is a perfume manufacturer who manages a retired boxer, Ryan O'Neil, in comedy about the fight game.

MANHATTAN (R). The inhabitants are somewhat frayed, but the Big Apple looks glorious in Woody Allen's witty peek at the pairings and partings among New York literati.

METEOR (PG). Disaster movies aren't big this year, but this is a big disaster movie about a five-mile-wide meteor on a collision course with earth. Sean Connery, Natalie Wood, Karl Malden and many others in the large, competent cast.

MR. MIKE'S MONDO VIDEO (R). TV film is collection of bizarre events in continuing, explosive, downbeat rip-off of "Mondo Cane."

1941 (PG). John Belushi and host of others in comedy about mythical Japanese attack on Los Angeles.

PEPPERMINT SODA (PG). Charming account of two adolescent sisters growing up in Paris in 1936.

PROMISES IN THE DARK (PG). Well-acted film with Marsha Mason as a doctor dealing with a terminally ill, young patient.

QUODROPHENIA (R). Story of disillusioned young man during '60s era of mods and rockers in England. Music by The Who.

ROCKY II (PG). Sylvester Stallone as Rocky Balboa, the over-the-hill boxer, returns for a rematch with the heavyweight champ.

THE ROSE (R). Bette Midler as '60s rock star living life of emotional extremes that suggest some parallels with career of James Joplin.

RUNNING (PG). Susan Anspach is the wife of Michael Douglas who is training to qualify for the Olympic marathon.

SCAVENGER HUNT (PG). Cloris Leachman, Richard Benjamin and Tony Randall in comedy about an elusive inheritance.

THE SEDUCTION OF JOE TYNNAN (R). Familiar story about the pressures on a "descent" politician, Alan Alda. Hackneyed situations are redeemed by the acting of Barbara Harris, Meryl Streep and Rip Torn.

SKATETWON U.S.A. (PG). The roller-disco craze gets its due in film about a championship derby and the hot rollers participatin.

STAR TREK — THE MOTION PICTURE (G). Space-film epic brings together familiar faces of Enterprise crew in semi-new setting and with razzle-dazzle special effects.

STARTING OVER (R). Romantic comedy with toned-down Bert Reynolds torn between his ex-wife, Candice Bergen, who records a hit song, and his new love, Jill Clayburgh, an independent schoolteacher.

SUNBURN (PG). Poorly written, edited and directed detective-comedy that should leave the participants red-faced.

10 (R). Comedy with Dudley Moore who tosses out his tenured roommate, Julie Andrews, in his search for the perfect "10."

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.

Neil Simon comedy due at Oakland University

Neil Simon's "The Good Doctor," opens the winter season for the Oakland University Theatre Arts Program on Thursday, Feb. 7.

All performances in the three-week run are in the Studio Theatre of Varner Recital Hall.

THE SIMON script is a collection of scenes either adapted from or suggested by the stories of Anton Chekhov.

The comedy takes its name from a scene in which a novice doctor tries to extract the tooth of a patient. Other scenes include the Governors, the Drowned Man, and a Quiet Man. There is a seduction scene and one entitled

the Arrangement in which a father attempts to help his young son come of age sexually.

OU STUDENT Christopher Howe of Rochester takes the critical role of the writer-narrator who ties the separate scenes into a single unit. Technical design is by James Arts Program. Costume designs are by Johanna Ludowski, designer for the Theatre Arts Program.

Performances are scheduled all for 8 p.m., Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 7-9, 14-16, and 21-23. There are 6:30 p.m. curtain Sunday Feb. 10 and 17 and a 2:30 p.m. performance Sunday, Feb. 24.

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