



LOUISE SNIDER

'Alcatraz' is on the loose

Since movies about prison life always seem to be around ("The Longest Yard," "Short Eyes," "On the Yard," etc.), there must be an audience for them. People who find these movies enormously entertaining. I am not one of them.

Prison films, as a category, are low on my list of preferences. Even so, I find "Escape from Alcatraz" (PG) a film I can admire if not entirely enjoy.

It is expertly crafted. Everything fits together as precisely as the parts of a Jaguar engine. Don Siegel's taut direction is a marvel of economy that welds the stark location (Alcatraz), low-key lighting, pungent photography and terse dialogue into a lean effective melodrama. The impact results from this singular match of form (the elements of production) and content (the story).

BASED ON A TRUE EVENT, the film features Clint Eastwood as Frank Morris who, with two accomplices, became the only prisoners ever to escape from Alcatraz, the former maximum security Federal penitentiary.

Siegel and Eastwood have worked together five times, and the director is credited with those films recognized as Eastwood's best, including "Coogan's Bluff" and "Dirty Harry." The current film is no exception to their successful record and is a decided improvement over Eastwood's last effort ("Every Which Way But Loose") in which he was outacted by an orangutan.

In "Escape from Alcatraz," Siegel uses the Eastwood mannerisms to maximum advantage. The steely stare, the squirel, the calculated moves, the existential loneness — all work toward reinforcing the sense of strength and inner resolve of the character.

The dialogue is sparingly but precisely parceled out. Like the photography, it only reveals what is necessary to move things along, without being either skimpy or superfluous.

FROM MORRIS' first encounter with the tough, egotistical warden (Patrick McGowan), who takes a peacock pride in running an escape-proof prison, the film inexorably proceeds through the stages of formulation, planning, preparation and escape. The climax and denouement actually constitute the weakest part of the film, but fortunately they only account for the last 10 minutes.

During this progression, Siegel touches on every convention of the prison film: The spoon stolen from the cafeteria, the homosexual bully, the dehumanization, the "old" prisoner with a hobby, the prisoner with a pet, the racial tension.

It is all quite familiar, but neither boring nor grim. The capable cast, crisp direction and finely honed script make a high-class entertainment package.

"Escape from Alcatraz" wasn't intended as meaningful social drama. Nevertheless, it effectively conveys the drabness and monotony of prison life and the effort it takes to remain human.

Glimpses

NEW RELEASES

ALIEN (R) Hair-raising, sci-fi horror film about alien life form that terrorizes the crew of a space ship.

BLOODLINE (R) Relatives trying to bump off pharmaceutical heists constitute a bitter pill in placebo version of Sydney Sheldon's best seller.

BUTCH AND SUNDANCE: THE EARLY DAYS (PG) "Pre-quel" to the successful hit. Tom Berger and William Katt are paired off as the rascally robbers in their salad days.

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

ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ (PG) Clint Eastwood and director Don Siegel team up again to create a tense, taut drama from the conventions of the prison-escape film.

THE FIFTH MUSKETEER (PG) Your average swashbuckling tale with heroes, villains and court intrigue. Beau Bridges deftly handles dual role as easy king and his noble twin.

HAIR (G) The counter culture musical of the '60s, directed by Miles Forman, comes to the screen with amazing vitality and musical energy — if a decade late.

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 LAST EMBRACE (R) Bizarre, tension-filled mystery is stylishly filmed, but burdened with hopelessly complicated plot.

THE LAST WAVE (PG) Offbeat mystery from Australia when lawyer (Richard Chamberlain) encounters the occult as he delves into aborigine culture.

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.

LOVE AT FIRST BITE (PG) Dracula goes disco dancing in funny, contemporary version with George Hamilton.

THE MAIN EVENT (PG) Barbara Seisand is a perfume manufacturer who manages a retired boxer, Ryan O'Neal, 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.

MOONRAKER (PG) James Bond (Roger Moore) in space adventure with Lois Chiles for company and Richard Kiel (the metal-mouthed "Jaws") for challenge in most spectacular of the 007 films.

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.



Peter Falk (left), and Alan Arkin star as mismatched future relatives in "The In-Laws."

Summer lights up Knob disco crowd

By JOANNE DIMATTEO

Donna Summer, the queen of disco, sparked at Pine Knob Wednesday night, turning a glittery stage into a fairyland atmosphere.

Looking like a princess in a bouffant gown, Miss Summer made her entrance on stage from a high flight of stairs surrounded by sparkling colored lights.

Miss Summer opened at Pine Knob with "Once Upon a Time," from her LP of the same name. She was accompanied by three female singers and a whole orchestra, bringing a pure disco sound to the audience, while the audience heard many of their favorite tunes, old and new.

Costume changes punctuated the show. She wore a long, black, sequined dress to sing more of her favorites, including a touching rendition of "The Way We Were." Miss Summer left the stage again while the orchestra played the beginning of "Love to Love You Baby," as the audience anticipated her return. She appeared for the song in a red glittery dress with clouds of smoke coming up around her.

Miss Summer's strong voice seemed unreal at times, as it carried out into the crowd. But her talent was evident. Her versatile act, ranging from disco to soft music, demonstrated how wide her talents range.

Miss Summer often talks to her audience, bringing them into her act, making her performance as casual as it is spectacular. She told the large crowd "and if you want to dance around, I don't care," which drew many cheers from the packed house at the Pine Knob amphitheater.

While Miss Summer sang "Last Dance" from the movie "Thank God It's Friday," the audience joined in singing and dancing. The song won an Academy Award and also won a Grammy Award for Miss Summer's version of Paul Jabara's song.

Miss Summer ended the show with her own version of "MacArthur Park," a popular song recorded by Richard Harris about 10 years ago.

Ever since Miss Summer hit the charts with "Love to Love You Baby" in 1975, she has had an incredible influence on what is now called disco music. Each album following that success single has demonstrated just how talented this lady can be.

Sharing the bill was Brooklyn Dreams, a New York trio that has been working with Miss Summer. The group was accompanied by six musicians and entertained with disco-type songs.

Miss Summer, along with Brooklyn Dreams portraying male roles, sang her most recent hit, "Hot Stuff," in a gold tiger print dress.

Donna Summer was born Donna Gaines in Boston, Mass. In 1968 she went to Germany to play in the German production of "Hair." She worked on the German stage for eight years. Miss Summer married Austrian actor Helmut Sommer, but the marriage ended after her success with "Love to Love You Baby." She then moved to California with her daughter Mimi, and changed the spelling of her name.

Her subsequent albums include, "A Trilogy of Love," followed by "Four Seasons of Love," "I Remember Yesterday," "Once Upon a Time," "Live and More" and her most recent, "Bad Girls."



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