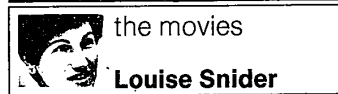




Flash Gordon (Sam J. Jones) and Vultan the Hawkman (Brian Blessed) prepare for an attack.



'Flash Gordon' called a success in space opera

"Flash Gordon" (PG) is a campy space opera, a zippy send up of the original Buster Crabbe serial on which it is based. This Dino De Laurentis production succeeds where his campy "King Kong" failed because it remains consistent in tone and because it doesn't flog around with the elements which have made the old films popular, late-night television fare around the country — even to deliberately mimicking the fake look and tackiness of the serials.

However, as you might expect, everything is on a grander scale in the motion picture. There is a clutter of furnishings that looks like some strange combination of Oriental baroque. Many of the actors wear costumes that would be appropriate for a Viennese operetta. It's all in trashy taste.

Like its predecessors, the film clips along, never forgetting the need for action, danger, escapes and thrills. It plays to the audience outrageously. Every scene is laced with innuendos and double entendres.

"Flash Gordon" opens with the crazy but knowledgeable Dr. Zerkov (Topol) shanghaing Flash and Dale in his space capsule. They fly to the planet Mongo where they attempt to thwart the plans of the arch-villain Emperor Ming who wants to destroy planet Earth.

FLASH is a quarterback for the New York Jets, and a straighter, nobler, more clean-cut athlete you'll never find Sam J. Jones (the blond, blond surfer who was Bo Derek's husband in "10") is perfect as Flash, manly but restrained.

When Ming's daughter, Princess Aura, goes after Flash's body, the honorable hero who is in love with Dale gasps in alarm, "This girl is really turning me on."

Like Flash, the other characters are equally well cast. Melody Anderson is delightful as the spunky Dale Arden. Max von Sydow is a cold, evil Emperor Ming. Topol a loony Dr. Zerkov, Ornella Muti a seductive Princess Aura and Brian Blessed is especially boisterous and colorful as the winged warrior, Vultan.

Ming rules over a diverse planetary population. Many of the events and characters suggest borrowings from other movies. Ming's secret police resemble Darth Vader, but it's all in good fun. One of the original contributions to the film, and a very successful one, is the music of Queen. The music and action are skillfully coordinated. One of the best examples of this occurs in the beginning when Flash and his companions appear in an audience before the emperor.

Ming's guards are punishing Flash until Dale tosses a globe-like object to him that awakens his football instincts. He takes off like some broken field runner leaving the opposition strewn behind him. All of this is accomplished to a high pitch of musical excitement.

Keeping the familiar characters moving to a contemporary beat gives this old-new space adventure the extra pop that makes it more entertaining than repetitive.

what's at the movies

- NEW RELEASES**
- AIRPLANE (PG)** A picture that takes off. This spoof of all those "Airport" movies is one of the zaniest films around.
 - THE AWAKENING (R)** Silly film about archaeologist and curse of long-dead Egyptian queen.
 - BAD TIMING/A SENSUAL OBSESSION** Nicholas Roeg's adult drama of pain-inflicting relationship between psychoanalyst (Art Garfunkel) and his lover (Theresa Russell).
 - DIVINE MADNESS (R)** Energetic and electrifying Bette Midler in film version of the Broadway show.
 - THE ELEPHANT MAN (PG)** Largely true story of grossly deformed man rescued from sordid life by compassionate doctor. Fine acting by John Hurt, Anthony Hopkins and John Gielgud balances out directorial shortcomings.
 - FADE TO BLACK (R)** Terror as deranged young man dresses as his movie favorites to re-enact their scenes.
 - FIRST DEADLY SIN (R)** Cop searches out killer responsible for series of bizarre murders. Frank Sinatra and Faye Dunaway star.
 - GLORIA (PG)** Gena Rowlands plays it straight as ex-mobster's girlfriend who knows how to handle a gun, which she uses to protect boy whose parents have been murdered.
 - THE GREAT SANTINI (PG)** Robert Duvall as air force pilot and dominating father in strong story of family conflict and love.
 - HOPSCOTCH (R)** Chemistry of Matthew Jackson pairing works again, but we don't see them together often enough in this halfway humorous (first half) film.
 - IT'S MY TURN (R)** Jill Clayburgh in humorous story as independent woman (again) who falls in love with ex-baseball player during weekend in New York.
 - LOVING COUPLES (PG)** A comic look at foibles of contemporary relationships, focusing on the love lives of four sophisticateds.
 - MIDDLE AGE CRAZY (R)** Turmoil in the family as Bruce Dern turns 40 and goes through mid-life crisis that finds him pursuing his youthful fantasies.
 - OH, GOD! BOOK II (PG)** George Burns returns as the Almighty with a new message, Luane, as "Tracey," to deliver his words.
 - ONE TRICK PONY (R)** Paul Simon wrote screenplay and music for film based partly on his own experiences as touring musician.
 - ORDINARY PEOPLE (R)** Robert Redford's directorial debut is a smash in this extraordinarily well-acted, moving film about a "perfect" family trying to cope with a son's mental illness.
 - PRIVATE BENJAMIN (R)** Goldie Hawn joins the army to escape and find herself.
 - SOMEWHERE IN TIME (PG)** Romance with Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour. Young man falls in love with portrait of a beautiful woman and goes back in time to find her.

Opera theater plans season

The North American premiere of an opera by Armenian composer Arman Tigranian is among the highlights of the Michigan Opera Theatre's (MOT) plans for 1981-82 season. Other highlights include expansions in both the number of productions and performances.

The announcement concerning the upcoming season was made last week by General Director David DiChiera. Instead of presenting four productions in a concentrated fall season at Detroit's Music Hall Centre, MOT will add a fifth production and split the season into two segments. Three works from the grand-opera repertoire will be part of a fall season opening on Oct. 2, 1981.

Two additional productions from a broader range of musical theater will constitute the second phase of the season, starting Jan. 15, 1982. All five productions will be offered in one subscription package, DiChiera said. A sixth performance of each fall opera had been added to allow an additional Saturday night subscription series to meet ticket demand.

Each production of the winter series will receive nine performances.

MOT's fall season will open Friday, Oct. 2, with a performance in Italian of Puccini's "Tosca." The title role at that performance — as well as Sunday, Oct. 4, and Saturday, Oct. 10 — will be sung by Giovanna Casolla, an Italian soprano who has been acclaimed throughout the world as a rising opera star.

Miss Casolla's "Tosca" with the MOT will be only her second appearance in the United States. She will make her United States debut in San Diego Opera's "Andrea Chénier" in September.

SINGING THE title role in the three English-language performances of "Tosca" will be American soprano Nan-

cy Shade, who last appeared with MOT in its first Music Hall production, "La Rondine," in 1971. Since that time, Miss Shade has achieved personal triumphs with major companies here and abroad.

The first English-language production of the season — Saturday, Oct. 3 — will be MOT's second annual Michigan Night, bringing together civic leaders and government officials from throughout the state. "Tosca" will also be sung in English on Tuesday, Oct. 5 and Friday, Oct. 9.

MOT's second production in the fall of 1981 will be a new mounting of Bizet's immortal "Carmen" — probably the most popular opera ever written. Performances — all sung in English — will be Oct. 16-18, 21, 23 and 24.

The fall season's third production — with performances Oct. 30 and 31 and Nov. 1, 4, 6 and 7 — will be the North American premiere of the Armenian opera "Anoush." Written in 1910 by Arman Tigranian, "Anoush" has been called the national opera of Armenia.

It's the story of a young girl driven to madness and death by the enmity between her brother and the man she loves. It allowed the composer to draw heavily on Armenian musical traditions, from love themes and folk dances for the ill-fated wedding celebration to the darker emotions of the opera's final scenes.

In a major scheduling change, the 1981-82 MOT season will be divided into two segments.

"Many subscribers have had reservations about a concentrated fall season," DiChiera said. "The new schedule will accommodate the many people who objected to having no MOT performances during the winter months."

Thus, the new winter season which opens on Jan. 15, 1982, will offer two musical productions with an emphasis on the popular instead of the classical repertoire. Each production will be given nine performances during an eight-day run at the Music Hall.

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