



Jane Alexander and John Hurt are the father and mother of the Strelzyk family in the Disney film "Night Crossing."



the movies

Louise Snider

'Night Crossing' keeps audience on edge of seats

One of the popular movies last year was "Victory." It was about Allied prisoners of war in Germany who formed a soccer team and used it as a means of escape.

A new adventure movie from Disney studios, "Night Crossing" (PG), parallels "Victory" in many ways. The story and characters are different, but the plot is almost the same. I point out the similarity not as a criticism but simply to call attention to the successful pattern adopted by these kinds of movies that belong to the "escape" category.

There are clear-cut good guys and bad guys, there is the problem of working out an escape, and there is the suspense. Will they be discovered? Will they make it?

"Night Crossing" takes place in East Germany. The bad guys are the authorities — the military and the government. The good guys are the people who want to get out of the country.

THE FOCUS narrows to one family, the Strelzyks, and their close friends. John Hurt plays the father. Hurt is a splendid actor (he was the "elephant man" who gives this movie its foundation. He takes his role in this Disney adventure just as seriously as something in a weightier film. Jane Alexander as his wife also adds her dramatic strength, and Doug McKean (the young boy in "On Golden Pond") keeps up with both of them. The cast is rounded out by Beau Bridges as Strelzyk's friend and helper and Glynnis O'Connor as Bridges' wife.

In a real sense, these people are prisoners. Their freedom of movement, let alone freedom of speech, is severely restricted. They are contained in East Germany by an 836-mile barbed-wire fence with automatically firing machine guns.

"Night Crossing" actually is based on the true experiences of two families, eight people, who sought to escape in a hot-air balloon.

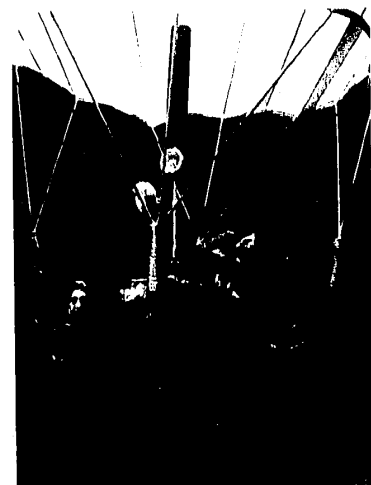
The Disney film does a fine job of conveying the gray grimness of their lives — hard work, consumer shortages and a controlled existence like animals in a laboratory.

SOME SCENES of Jane Alexander shopping for food are especially effective in getting across the atmosphere and tensions. She buys one egg at a time. When she reaches for the only orange on display, another shopper who is quicker snatches it away from her grasp.

A moment later, the other shopper, her eyes downcast, says, "I'm so ashamed," and hands Alexander the orange. This incident says more about the depressing climate of life in East Germany (and, we might infer, in other Eastern European countries as well) than many scholarly treatises.

It certainly helps establish why people would risk everything, including their lives, to get out. It took a lot of courage, a lot of determination and a lot of ingenuity to attempt the dangerous escape method chosen by the Strelzyks.

This is the kind of movie that makes audiences cheer. Like "Victory," it fires one up with enthusiasm for those who dare.



Daring escape by hot-air balloon is made by the Strelzyks, attempting to get out of East Germany.

what's at the movies

ABSENCE OF MALICE (PG). Sally Field stars as a reporter who libels an importer (Paul Newman) in a murder case. Film written by former Detroit Free Press editor Kurt Luedtke.

THE AMATEUR. Computer analyst with CIA sets out to avenge the death of his girlfriend by terrorists. John Savage, Marthe Keller and Christopher Plummer star.

ARTHUR (PG). Dudley Moore is a playboy millionaire in love with Liza Minnelli in this contemporary comedy.

ATLANTIC CITY (R). Louis Malle's wonderfully vibrant, superbly acted, romantic film about old and young dreamers in Atlantic City.

BEAU PERE (R). A sexy, sophisticated comedy from Bertrand Blier. Oscar-winning director of "Get Out Your Handkerchiefs." Patrick Dewaere stars as the stepfather and Ariel Besse is his 14-year-old stepdaughter. The problem is she's madly in love with him.

THE BORDER (R). Jack Nicholson portrays a border-patrol guard driven to violence by a nitwit wife, a corrupt colleague and a frustrating job.

CHARIOTS OF FIRE (PG). True and compelling story of two runners. One runs for the glory of god, the other to battle bigotry. Outstanding and elevating movie.

HEARTLAND (PG). A young widow with her 7-year-old daughter goes to work as a housekeeper for a Scottish widower. The two struggling individuals grow to share their love for the land and family commitment, in drama set in Wyoming in 1910.

MAKING LOVE. Story of a young couple, married eight years, who must come to terms with the husband's attraction to another man.

MODERN PROBLEMS (PG). The misadventures of a lovesick air traffic controller, played by Chevy Chase.

NIGHT CROSSING (PG). Walt Disney dramatic adventure about two young couples and their children who make a daring escape in a hot-air balloon.

Crossroads announces tribute to Noel Coward

The wit and wisdom of Noel Coward is celebrated in the musical comedy revue "Oh, Coward" presented by Crossroads Productions at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday and Feb. 26-27 at the Southfield Parks and Recreation Building, 26000 Evergreen at Civic Center Drive.

Direction is by Laurie Logan, with musical direction by Aaron Hunt. In the cast are Susan Borofsky, Richard Buzinski and Gary Dirda.

General admission is \$5, with special rates for students, senior citizens and groups. For more information, call Crossroads at 569-9040 during regular business hours or the Cultural Arts Division of the city of Southfield at 354-4717.

"Oh, Coward" has replaced "Good Evening" for the adult theater season. The comedy "Same Time Next Year" has replaced "Twigs" on April 23-24 and April 30, May 1.

The children's season has been canceled because the city of Southfield had to rechannel funds to support other services, Crossroads said. Crossroads is supported in part by the City of Southfield Department of Parks and Recreation and the First Baptist Church of Detroit in Southfield.

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Co-stars in comedy

West Bloomfield resident Shirley Benyas, a Detroit music teacher, and Leo McGill of Oak Park, who has been featured at many local theaters since the early 1930s, are playing the leads in "A Majority of One." The comedy by Leonard Spigelgass continues through March 6 at Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre in Bloomfield Township. Ms. Benyas portrays Mrs. Jacoby, a Jewish widow from Brooklyn. McGill is Koichi Asano, a distinguished Japanese gentleman.

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