

'Little Whorehouse' — lots of fun



Elliott (Henry Thomas) confronts a strange sight in "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial."

the movies
Louise Snider

Take a pal to see compelling story of space creature

Children, grab your parents. Parents, grab your children. Anyone, grab a friend, lover, stranger off the street and go see "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial" (PG).

It's an exhilarating experience, and one that deserves to be shared with someone. Those whose have seen "E.T." already are sharing a special mood and feeling. Steven Spielberg's movie creates an emotional high of good will that, in some strange way, even infects those about to see the movie, who share a happy sort of camaraderie waiting in line.

Spielberg describes "E.T." as his most personal movie, but it also can be seen as a continuation of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." The premise is, What would happen if one of the beings from outer space accidentally were stranded on earth?

"E.T." begins with the strange, frightened Extra-Terrestrial separated from his spaceship and hunted by a menacing group of men. It is the flip side of the usual scenario in which humans are terrorized by creatures from outer space, as in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" or "The Thing."

IT IS ONE of Spielberg's great strengths as a creative artist that he is able to bring us different points of view and make them credible. Actually, in "E.T." we get two different points of view: that of the Extra-Terrestrial in which adult humans appear as anonymous and threatening creatures, and that of the 10-year-old Elliott who befriends E.T.

To Elliott, whose father has deserted the family, adults are not menacing as much as they are callous and uncaring. Elliott comes to regard E.T. as a very special and secret friend, not a scientific curiosity to be probed and dissected.

The special relationship between Elliott and E.T. is the heart of the movie. Although the plot is about an alien stranded on earth who wants to return home, the theme explores values of trust, friendship and reverence for life.

The bond of friendship that grows between E.T. and Elliott becomes so strong that they develop a telepathic rapport. Each feels what affects the other. In one of the movie's most inventive scenes, Elliott disrupts an entire class at school when E.T., left alone at home, samples some beer with wild results.

Both Melissa Mathison, who wrote the script, and Spielberg, who conceived the original idea and directed, have remarkable insight into children and animals. They do a magnificent job of capturing the nervous beginnings of introduction, as Elliott and E.T. become acquainted through a series of hesitant advances and skittish retreats.

THE PATTERN is similar to that shown in "The Black Stallion," also scripted by Mathison, in which the boy befriends the horse. In "The Black Stallion," the boy entices the horse with seaweed. In "E.T.," he does it with M&Ms.

To realize the potential of this movie, Spielberg has put together a splendid cast, none of whom are well known, but all of whom deliver perfectly tuned performances. Among them are Dee Wallace as Elliott's mother, Drew Barrymore as his little sister and Robert McNaughton as his older brother.

Henry Thomas, who appeared as one of Sissy Spacek's children in "Raggedy Man," is outstanding as Elliott. He delivers an emotional punch near the end of the movie that would put to shame the efforts of many adult actors.

Finally, Carlo Rambaldi must be singled out for creating E.T. His range of expression and movement is so great, and he appears so real, that you expect to find him listed in the credits like any other actor.

The result is that the Extra-Terrestrial is the kind of lovable creature anyone would like to take home. After all, you never grow too old to want a special friend. Spielberg knows that and has captured that longing in a movie bound to have timeless and universal appeal.



Keys (Peter Coyote) and Mary (Dee Wallace) talk about the capture and study of E.T., while Elliott listens.

Performances of the musical "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" continue through July 25 at the Birmingham Theatre, 211 S. Woodward, Birmingham. Curtain time is 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays and matinees at 2 p.m. Wednesdays and Sundays. For tickets, call the box office at 644-3533.

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

A lively show, with plenty of good songs and choreography, is "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," starring Edie Adams, at the Birmingham Theatre.

This production has lots of energy and singing voices that are pleasing to the ear. The audience on opening night loved "The Aggie Song," the musical number sung and danced by the foot-stompin' Aggies football team.

The team goes from football helmets and jerseys to Texas hats and checked shirts as they prepare for a night at the "Chicken Ranch" whorehouse to celebrate their victory. At curtain time, the struttin' Aggies in their cowboy boots

review

got the biggest applause.

Edie Adams is a good-natured Miss Mona, slightly brassy and bold, whose manner is more gentle than her appearance would indicate. She looks the epitome of a tough madam, with her overblown locks of flaming red hair and a first-act entrance costume of royal blue and marabou.

ART LUND plays the aging but relentlessly determined Sheriff Ed Earl Dodd, who runs his town like a one-man band. Lund is a big guy with a big voice, and he comes on surprisingly strong in this role that could easily become a comic second-banana for the rest of the proceedings.

Lund manages to extract a lot of sympathy, as well as humor, for his character, and almost overpowers the production.

The real-life "best little whorehouse" had a history of 150 years in Texas un-

til it was closed down in the 1970s by do-gooders. In the musical, Stephen Bray is Melvin P. Thorpe, the "Watchdog" of "The Watchdog News," who leads the vigilante efforts to get Mona and the Girls out.

Bray neatly handles the role of The Watchdog, perfectly attuned to his TV audience, with a fantastic headful of hair and shining teeth. The stage production clearly takes a stand for the Chicken Ranch, which got its name because farmboys who couldn't pay in cash for services rendered paid in chickens.

AS PRESENTED here, it's all good, clean fun. In fact, one of the songs in the show reminds everybody that ain't nothing dirty goin' on. Mona and the Girls sing, "It's just a lil ole bitty pissant country place," making sex for money sound almost wholesome.

Part of the show's appeal is its mix of daring and endearing. Dora Pearson is Angel, and Rebecca Ann Seay is Shy, two girls who arrive at the Chicken Ranch, off the same bus, to ask Miss Mona for jobs. Pearson is appropriately nerdy but good-hearted underneath and a dedicated absentee mother to boot. Seay makes her little farm girl winsome as she learns the tricks of the trade.

Hypocrisy is spoofed in such numbers as "Texas Has a Whorehouse in It," sung by the Melvin Thorpe gang; the "Angelette March," danced by tapping feet of the shiny-cheeked Imogene Charlene and the Angelettes; and "The Sidestep," sung and danced by the Governor of Texas (Philip Oesterman).

The Governor neatly sidesteps demands to close down the Chicken

Ranch, until he finds it politically expedient to do so.

With all this pay-sex, free love isn't left out either. Edwina Lewis is featured in the cast as Jewel, Miss Mona's personal maid, who on her day off gives away what the other Girls sell.

In "Twenty-Four Hours of Lovin'," Lewis belts out with abandon her philosophy of love. She's got a voice that can go from whisper to shout with gospel-like enthusiasm.

"THE BEST Little Whorehouse" is so carefully put together that each musical number has a life of its own, yet adds progressively to the whole. From the opening "20 Fans," where the Girls sing about their jobs, to the near-closing "Hard Candy Christmas," where they foresee their bleak futures, the songs have vivid color.

There are other poignant numbers. "Doatsey Mae," sung by Amy Miller, the lunch-counter waitress, shows how a good girl thinks when she's like to be a little bit bad. Doatsey Mae has dreams, some of them spicy, but she's too respectable to fulfill any of them.

Miss Mona has a nice song, "Girl You're a Woman," which she sings to the newly arrived Shy, reminding her of life's reality. In "Bus from Amarillo" Mona sings to herself, recalling her own efforts to escape from one life into another. She never had the guts to take the bus to nowhere.

Keeping the show moving brightly onstage throughout is a country band, led by Art Yelton, who sings the saga of the Chicken Ranch. John Newton contributes to the sprightly activity in dual roles as the Senator, who brings the football team to the Chicken Ranch, and the town's part-time Mayor, who also sells cars.

Area residents teach drama at the Eagle

Three Birmingham-Bloomfield residents will teach beginning and advanced drama classes, focusing on musical theater, at the Eagle Theatre, 13 S. Saginaw, Pontiac.

Tom Emmott of Birmingham, Teri Hoffman of Bloomfield Hills and Susan Martin of Birmingham are the instructors, who believe that studying in a legitimate theater will greatly enhance the learning experience of young performing artists.

Russ Schulte, owner of the Eagle Theatre, adds that these drama classes will provide a new dimension in the rebirth of this theater with its classic, Moorish architecture.

Two sessions will be

held for each division, Monday-Thursday, July 12-22 and July 28 to Aug. 5. Beginning classes meet in the morning from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. for ages 9-13. Advanced classes meet in the afternoon 1:45 p.m. for young adults older than 13.

NO ACTING experience is necessary for the beginning drama workshop. Students will participate in the following classes: improvisation, scene study, Orff instrumental classes, stagecraft, choreography and stage singing.

The advanced theater workshop is offered to students with prior stage experience.

For further information, contact Tom Emmott, artistic director, at 335-3470 or 644-8570.



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