



Marsha Mason is a school teacher struggling to support herself and her son. Her father returns and gives them lots of expensive gifts in "Max Dugan Returns."

the movies
Louise Snider

Cinderella suffers in heavy-handed comedy by Simon

"Max Dugan Returns" (PG) is basically a Cinderella story in a contemporary setting. The Cinderella in this case is Marsha Mason as Nora McPhee, the widowed mother of a teenage son. She is struggling to support her family on her own. Prince Charming is a police lieutenant, Brian Costello, played by Donald Sutherland. He meets Nora when her 16-year-old auto is stolen. For a while, it seems as if he is going to deliver her from her one-woman battle against low pay, broken appliances and a transportation problem. But that is left to the Fairy Godmother. She, in this movie, a "he," is none other than Jason Robards as Max Dugan, Nora's father who deserted the family 26 years ago. He does not return empty-handed. He arrives with more than \$600,000 he skimmed from casino receipts while a blackjack dealer in Las Vegas. Don't think of him as a crook, though. He only took the money because the casino owners cheated him out of that amount on some land he owned. Well, quicker than you can wave a magic wand, Max is making up for 26 years of neglect. This movie must be a consumer's idea of what heaven is like as Max goes on a buying spree.

FOR STARTERS, Nora gets a cream-colored Mercedes-Benz convertible and Michael (Matthew Broderick), her son, gets more electronic gear than you'll find at an air-defense installation. Then Max has the dilapidated house remodeled and redecorated so that it becomes a gingerbread castle, complete with champion Great Dane show dog for guard and companion. Is Nora happy with all these material possessions? Of course not. Remember, Nora is Marsha Mason, and Mason is the great ketch of movies. She keeps arguing with Max and insisting that he return everything. She tells this to Michael, and he doesn't even twinge, though he seems like a normal teen.

Try telling your teenage son that you are going to remove all his stereo equipment. Would he passively consent or would he cut your heart out with his diamond necklace? That should be enough to convince you that "Max Dugan Returns" is neither comedy nor fantasy. It's the world according to Neil Simon, and it is less funny, more dull-witted than any other Neil Simon film to date. Mason must keep up an irritating tirade of arguments. All the while, she accepts Max's gifts while scolding him for buying them. unbecomingly in his role. Jason Robards manages to give the film a glimmer of respectability by resisting any urge to be a cute, whimsical old man.

HE HAS SOME of the better lines in the movie. He also has some of the most pretentious ones. Max fancies himself (or Simon fancies Max) as a homespun philosopher. Maybe he did desert his wife and child, maybe he did spend time in jail, maybe he did steal money from a gambling casino. Still, there's a lot of good in him. Otherwise, he would've spout all this philosophy, which Simon has condensed into heavy one-liners. Instead of zingers, we get zongers. One more script like this, and Simon can change his name from Neil to Simple.

Bacteria mellow red wines' acidity

In the ancient days, and in those of not so long ago as well, wines would be closely watched in the spring after harvest and initial fermentation.

On occasion, wines that had been resting quietly since their initial period of foment would suddenly burst into life, an "awakening to the spring" with the warmer weather.

Our understanding of this phenomenon comes from the work of Louis Pasteur. At the turn of the century, he learned that this dramatic spring madness is nothing less than a secondary fermentation, induced by bacteria sometimes present in the winery.

When these wild strains of bacteria were activated by warm spring weather, they would change the wine. When they were not, nothing. Very unsatisfactory. (Nor can initial fermentation be left to the caprice of nature either. Cultured yeast strains are used to assure this occurrence as well.)

TODAY, NEARLY ALL modern wineries induce the process in certain wines by using controlled yeast enzyme strains. It is no longer left to chance. This ability dates only from the 1950s in both France and California, the lat-

ter owing its knowledge to the fine technicians of the University of California at Davis.

What happens in this operation is that the yeasts go to work on the wine. When the bacteria strains are introduced into the wine, they begin to multiply until they have amassed sufficient strength to attack the malic acid that is a natural element of grapes. They break down the diacid, malic, and de-generate it into a monoacid, lactic, which contains only half the effective strength.

The process reduces the strength of the naturally present acids in the wine and dramatically softens it. Thus, from an ideal perspective, one wants malolactic fermentation to occur in those wines that are naturally high in acidity, i.e., reds, and to not want it in those that are low, i.e., whites.

THE INTRODUCTION OF yeast strains and increase in temperature assures that cabernet sauvignon, petite sirah and zinfandel will go through alcohol fermentation each spring after harvest. The event tends to take away some of the harshness that is a natural product of the winemaking pro-



wine
Richard Watson

cess, especially in the big red wines where extended skin contact in the crushed grapes has produced a highly acidic product.

Because pinot noir is naturally less endowed with acidity, it is frequently kept cool and free from the yeast strains so that it will retain the slight acidity it naturally has.

THE PROCESS MAY take a week or up to six months. Nine months is optimal.

In the more delicate world of white wines, where initial fermentation is secondary fermentation is not wanted, except sometimes in chardonnay. This massive white wine, which is often more acidic and flavorful than some

weak reds, may well be induced to go through the process to make it softer and more complex.

Chardonnays that are described as "buttery" have probably been through the exercise or at least some of the exercise. It is the sweeter, fruitier wines (chenin blanc and johannisberg riesling especially) that need the acidity of the grape to offset their natural sweetness, thereby producing wines described as "balanced."

The process of producing wine, such as a "natural" operation, has a great many subtle nuances. One of them, the action of a simple enzyme on malic acid to reduce it to lactic is extremely important to the quality of the red wines we drink.

what's at the movies

BETRAYAL (R) Jeremy Irons, Ben Kingsley and Patricia Hodge are caught up in emotional triangle in movie scripted by Harold Pinter.

GANDHI (PG) Epic film about Mahatma Gandhi, political and spiritual leader who led movement for Indian independence from Britain. Magnificent performance by Ben Kingsley as Gandhi.

THE GIFT (R) Bedroom farce with Pierre Mondy as a retired, married banker whose quiet life is changed by an unusual gift — an international beauty.

HIGH ROAD TO CHINA (PG) Action, romance and adventure as Tom Selleck and Bess Armstrong make their way across the orient in a race against time.

LOCAL HERO (PG) Wry look at a Texas oil company's intrusion into a quaint oilfield village. Stars Bart Lancaster, Peter Riegert, Fulton McKay and Dennis Lawson.

THE MAN FROM SNOWY MOUNTAIN (PG) Hand-some adventure film from Australia presents sirah and zinfandel will go through alcohol fermentation each spring after harvest. The event tends to take away some of the harshness that is a natural product of the winemaking pro-

MAX DUGAN RETURNS (PG) Marsha Mason, Neil Simon, Donald Sutherland and Jason Robards combine talents in story of schoolteacher who struggles to support her young son, then receives big-money gifts from ex-convict father.

THE OUTSIDERS (PG) C. Thomas Howell, Matt

Dillon and Ralf Macchio star in adaptation of S.E. Hinton's classic about conflict between poor and rich boys in Tulsa of 1966.

TOOTSIE (PG) Offbeat comedy with Dustin Hoffman as a struggling New York actor who can't get a job until he dresses as a woman to audition for a role in a soap opera.

TOUGH ENOUGH (PG) Story of country-western

singer, who tries for a career in the boxing ring, was partly filmed in Detroit. Stars Dennis Quaid, Warren Oates, Pam Grier and Stan Shaw.

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.

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Donald Sutherland is a police detective infatuated with the school teacher in Neil Simon's newest, dullest film comedy.