



Ed Harris is John Glenn, first American to orbit the earth three times, in "The Right Stuff."

the movies

Louise Snider

'The Right Stuff' packs too much into 3 hours

Don Greenberg, guest critic for this week's movie review, is a film instructor at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills.

Although many are raving about "The Right Stuff," it is difficult to understand why. The film does have a lot of stuff, good, bad and mediocre. But too much stuff is crammed into this three-hour saga of the Mercury astronauts.

Their trials and tribulations, at home and in the air, are intermixed with national and international politics and the business of space flight. The super heroics of test pilot Chuck Yeager (Sam Shepard) put the cake.

Although not qualified as an astronaut, near the film's end he mystically gains great moral stature, surviving a jet crash while the seven Mercury astronauts receive world-class acclamation in Houston under Lyndon Johnson's political patronage and Sally Rand's feathered fan dance.

If that all sounds a bit much, it is, even for a three-hour epic.

"THE RIGHT STUFF" opens with a 40-minute, softly photographed, nicely nostalgic sequence of jet test-piloting in the late '40s. Air Force Test Pilot Yeager rides the X-1 through the sound barrier (March 1) with broken ribs.

In case you wonder how he broke his ribs, there's a nifty sequence as he picks up his wife Glennis (Barbara Hershey) in Pancho's Happy Bottom Riding Club (the local flyboy's bar) and crashes through the desert underbrush on horseback.

Of course, his sexual expectations are thwarted in a riding accident. But the great, gum-chewing hero flies March 1, broken ribs and all. It may be historical, but on a wide screen it is pure kokomo. The soft, muted reds and yellow of the opening segment beautifully convey reverence for Yeager and other pioneers. Silhouetted mourners at graveside services for test pilots and a lovely shot of Mrs. Scott Carpenter (Susan Rase), desperately clutching a pillow as she sinks to a desolate bed, sum up the loneliness and fear of women whose men fly.

However evocative such scenes, writer/director Phillip Kaufman fails to restrain his extensive material. Selecting and training astronauts was a long process. Ultimately, Shepherd, Grissom and Glenn rocket to glory. There was a long journey. Director Kaufman makes ours too long — three hours and counting.

ONE CAN ONLY watch so many faces in space helmets filling the screen at acute angles, so many rockets exploding, so many jet fighters and rockets whizzing by, and clouds, lots of clouds. A good jet whoosh is fine once in a while, but this was just plain tiresome.

The overly broad satire, particularly of Lyndon Johnson and the press also evidences immature direction. Johnson's portrait as the godfather of the Houston space industry is plain silly. President Johnson may have been a politician in the worst sense of the word, but he was neither a fool nor a childish buffoon.

Nor can one believe that all reporters are howling jackals ready to kill for a story. The exception, of course, being Eric Sevareid, sitting woodenly at an outdoor table commenting with total disinterest as rockets are launched.

The film's historical figures include Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, the former portrayed by an actor, the latter in newscast footage. John Glenn (Ed Harris) is a truly heroic figure. It will be interesting to see if this film provides the right stuff for Senator Glenn's presidential campaign.

The musical score is excellent, whether in booming emphasis of astronautical triumph or in setting the historical scene with hit tunes of yesteryear. The "Hallelujah Chorus," however, is the wrong note for the astronauts' introductory press conference.

DIRECTOR KAUFMAN believes, "Ultimately, the film is a paean to American heroism, but it pokes fun at American institutions." Those objectives are difficult to achieve. Trying to adore heroes is neat. Poking fun, however, should be funny, not silly.

"The Right Stuff" is adolescent satire, leavened only by the exuberance JFK's Camelot brought to America. The film's beautiful photographic sequences and the Mercury astronauts' tremendous accomplishments are poorly served.



Sam Shepard is Chuck Yeager and Barbara Hershey is his wife Glennis, who celebrate his achievement as first man to break the space barrier.

upcoming things to do

● CORRECTION

Therion Wilder's classic "Our Town" will open Ridgedale Players' 52nd season Friday-Sunday, Nov. 4-6, 11-13, and Friday-Saturday, Nov. 18-19, in its new home at 205 W. Long Lake Road, Troy. Curtain time will be 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays and 7 p.m. Sundays. The phone number for ticket information was incorrectly given in Thursday's paper. The correct number is 255-0799.

● MEADOW BROOK

"The Magnificent Yankee" will be the second production of the season for Meadow Brook Theatre, opening a four-week run at 8:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 3, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. The production stars Peter Brandon, who last appeared on Broadway in "Medea" starring Zsa Zsa, and Priscilla Morrill, who played the role of Lou Grant's wife on TV's "Mary Tyler Moore Show" and is featured in the HBO movie "Right of Way" to be telecast next month. For ticket information call the box office at 377-3000.

● PLAZA SUITE

The Troy Players will present Neil Simon's comedy "Plaza Suite" at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Nov. 11-12, 18-19, at the Troy Community Center, 1-75 at Big Beaver. Admission is \$5, \$4 for students 18 and under and seniors.

● BOTSFORD INN

The Broadway musical hit "Guys and Dolls," presented by Nancy Gerwin Productions, opens Sunday, Nov. 13, at the Botsford Inn Dinner Theatre at 28000 Grand River, Farmington Hills. Performances will be Thursdays and Sundays, with cocktails at 8 p.m., dinner at 8:30 and the show at 9. Admission of \$19.50 includes tips and gratuities. For reservations call 474-4800.

● 'NIGHT MUSIC'

Tenor Charles Tighe of Farmington Hills will sing the role of Henrik. Jazz Shaffmaster of Birmingham will play the role of Osa in the Michigan Opera Theatre production of Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night Music," opening Friday, Nov. 18, at the Music Hall



Peter Brandon and Priscilla Morrill will portray Justice and Fanny Holmes in Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "The Magnificent Yankee."

Center in Detroit. Fifteen performances will run through Dec. 3. The musical will feature vocalist Clio Laine, with her husband John Dank-

worth as musical director. Tickets are available at the music hall box office. To charge tickets call 983-7680.

table talk

KLANCY'S is a newly opened restaurant, formerly the Flame, at 38170 Grand River at 10 Mile in Farmington Hills. Owner Dennis Eliassen said the restaurant "has been remodeled inside and out. We warmed it up with carpeting and a lot of wood." An awning outside and latticework are other touches. Eliassen opened the Flame in 1972, later sold the business and bought it back in June. He changed the name to Klancy's in September. "It's more than just fast food now," he said. "We want to make a dinner place out of it." Complete dinners are priced from \$4.25 with an entree of veal cutlet to \$9.95 for porterhouse steak. Also on the menu are burgers, sandwiches, chicken offerings, dieters' delights, and "Klancy's Spaces." The latter includes potato skins, fritattas — open-face omelets, and pita pizza. Restaurant hours are 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week.

BLOOMFIELD CHARLEY'S, the Chuck Muer-owned family tavern in West Bloomfield, will mark its seventh anniversary Monday, Nov. 14. Dining room manager Marge Olsen said the restaurant will celebrate with "a giant-sized cocktail party from 2-6 p.m." Drinks and food will be available at special prices and there will be punch and free hors d'oeuvres. Chuck Muer and other top executives of the Muer Corp. are expected to attend. The party also honors longtime employee Diane Coppersmith, a mother-to-be who is leaving her job at Bloomfield Charley's on Nov. 14. She worked there seven years and before that for a year at the old Charley's Crab that burned down at the former Rotunda Inn.

WICKER WORKS has more than a dozen salads on the buffet table for Sunday brunch at the Northfield Hilton Inn, 5500

Crooks at 1-75, Troy. There are fruit juices, fresh fruits and Danish. Eggs include scrambled, benedict and omelets to order. Other dishes that rotate are seafood omeburgers, steamship round of beef and sliced smoked salmon. Cheeses and bakery goods are more offerings. Hours are 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Brunch is priced at \$4.95, including coffee and dessert for adults, \$4.95 for children younger than 12.

THE MICHIGAN Restaurant Association recently moved its headquarters from Southfield to the Executive Building at 690 E. Maple, Suite 205, Birmingham. The 1,600-member organization represents 3,000 restaurants throughout Michigan. This month, the industry is marking Restaurant/Hospitality Month.

SOUTH SEAS entrees have been added to the menu for the Prime Rib Buffet from 6-10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays at L.J. Loophole's in the Sheraton-Southfield Hotel. Live entertainment features island music, and chopsticks and leis for each guest to point up the Polynesian motif. Sixteen salads are available. Entrees include prime rib and lamb carved to order, as well as Chicken Cashew, Lobster Newburg, Beef and Pea Pods and Punnet Noodles. Stir-fry vegetables complete the new menu, which is offered at low prices, \$4.95 for adults and \$3.95 for children younger than 10. Fresh fruit desserts may be ordered for \$1.50 each, tropical fruit drinks for \$1.75. No reservations are taken.

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