



Richard Gere is jazzman Dixie Dwyer and Diane Lane is Vera Cicero, a would-be nightclub owner, in "The Cotton Club."



the movies

Dan Greenberg

Director Coppola doesn't do better with 'Cotton Club'

"You can't argue with success," or so the conventional wisdom runs. Francis Ford Coppola directed the very successful "Godfather" films, ergo, he must be a great director.

Quite frankly, Coppola is vastly overrated as a film director. "The Godfather" was an OK gangster epic. "Apocalypse Now" was the dumbest war movie ever.

For all its advance hype, legal problems, big budget and cast of thousands, "The Cotton Club" does nothing to revise my estimate of Coppola.

The film is entertaining and has some nice moments but, on the whole, the \$4.50-a-ticket moviegoers deserve something more for their money from these multi-million dollar expenditures.

THE COTTON CLUB was, from 1923 to 1936, a famous nightclub up in Harlem where high-toned white folks went to be entertained by the great or soon-to-be great black entertainers of the era. It was Prohibition and no one much minded that the Cotton Club was operated by bootleggers. It made sense. Since you had to deal with bootleggers to get booze, you might as well drink it in their club.

Woven throughout this fabric are the stories of the bootleggers and entertainers, some real life and some fictional, who worked in and around the Cotton Club. Some of the fictional characters closely resemble historical figures and some historical figures are shabby as portrayed.

So, there you have "The Cotton Club," a musical gangster movie... or is it a gangster movie with songs. Sometimes it is hard to tell.

White jazzman Dixie Dwyer (Richard Gere) lives and plays his horn in Harlem. Inadvertently he saves the life of Dutch Schultz (James Remar), who becomes his protector and employer. Schultz's protégé-mistress, would-be nightclub owner Vera Cicero (Diane Lane), and Dwyer are thrown together in an ill-starred romance.

Their story, and Schultz's, weave in and out of the Cotton Club where Dwayne Madden (Bob Hoskins) and Frenchy Demange (Fred Gwynne) hold forth as the managing directorate of the club and most of the rackets in town.

THE RISE to stardom of Sandman Williams (Gregory Hines), with and without his brother Clay (Maurice Hines), and Sandman's on-again, off-again affair with Lila Rose Oliver (Loretta McKeen) is another major, though incomplete and unfulfilling, storyline.

Hines and Hines do some excellent dance numbers and there is plenty of good jazz at the Cotton Club including several extended Cab Calloway (Larry Marshall) numbers.

One complaint about "The Cotton Club" is its abrupt editing pattern. The excellent musical numbers are interrupted often, as if Coppola was afraid we'd forget the gangster story if we sat through an entire musical number. The opposite was also true and, whatever the reason, the choppy editing drags viewers' attention away before visual or story satisfaction is achieved.

The final musical number is an exception. There Coppola overestimates the audience. His continual segue from a Cotton Club "railroad" dance number to the actual Grand Central Station setting and back is confusing and not nearly as spectacular as Coppola must have envisioned.

The film does have good performances by Gere and Lane as the ill-fated lovers, Fred Gwynne as the amiable giant mobster and Joe Dallesandro with just the right viciousness as Lucky Luciano.

Julian Beck as psychotic, unfeeling mobster Sol Weinstein provides a vivid portrait but such performances are offset by the tacky, cameo routines of James Cagney (Vincent Jerosa), Fanny Brice (Rosalind Wiseman) and others, particularly Gregory Rozakis as Charlie Chaplin, the longest of these star-cameos. Chaplin brings Lila to the Cotton Club and does his famous Dinner Roll dance from "The Gold Rush." All very plastic and unnecessary.

These complaints notwithstanding, you probably should see "The Cotton Club" for it does have its moments, just not enough of them considering Coppola's reputation and bankroll.



Maurice Hines (left) is Clay Williams and Gregory Hines is Sandman Williams, who rises to stardom.

table talk

Santa visiting Christmas Day buffet

Families and friends may gather for a Christmas buffet from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 25, at the Grand Ballroom of the Northfield Hilton Hotel in Troy. The holiday setting will include ice carvings, Christmas lights and a harpist playing. Santa will attend, with free photos taken with children under 4, a donation (to go to Children's Hospital) accepted for other photos. Roast duck, turkey, ham, roast beef, rigatoni and seafood morsels are among specialties at the buffet, priced at \$9.95 for adults, \$4.95 for children under 12. For reservations call 679-2190.

Cherry Bowl

A Cherry Bowl Brunch, a buffet served before the big game, will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 22, at the Pike Street Company restaurant in Pontiac. A shuttle bus will take the brunch bunch (by reservation) to the Cherry Bowl football game between Michigan State University and Army at the Pontiac Silverdome. After the game, a Cherry Bowl Victory Bash from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the restaurant will feature drinks, a disc jockey and dancing. The spirit of Christmas will be celebrated 5-10 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 23, at the Pike Street Company. Greg Nichols will play the lav-

ern's grand piano, to accompany carols by his Christmas choir.

Helping out

Fifty disadvantaged children will be guests at a holiday dinner presented by Mother Waddles and the Hotel Pontchartrain on Monday afternoon, Dec. 24, at the Detroit hotel. On the menu is roast turkey and cranberry sauce, plus lots of desserts. Magicians and musicians will entertain, and the youngsters will receive Christmas presents.

Joins the team

Onetime Channel 7 anchorman Lee (Leon) McNew is now part of the management team at the Clarkston Cafe. The restaurant in Clarkston is owned and operated by McNew's son, Pat, daughter-in-law, Lee, and her father, Donald Hayes. The cafe boasts a pinkish white cabernet from California as house wine. During the holidays, customers are being offered a free cup of coffee "for the road."

Korean-Chinese

Mike Che of the New Mandarin Garden in Farmington Hills says Korean-Chinese delicacies are

served at his restaurant, which specializes in Mandarin-Szechuan cuisine. Beer wine and cocktails, including Chinese beer and liquors, also are available.

— Ethel Simmons

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