

Good humor pervades film

"Hollywood Shuffle" (R) is refreshing, a breezy, satiric look at contemporary Hollywood which focuses in particular on the limited career possibilities for black actors.

Considering the cynicism towards Hollywood and its mad dash for the dollar with youth-oriented movies, it is really quite remarkable that Robert Townsend was able to write, direct, produce and star in a film that maintains its high spirits and good nature throughout.

Satirists are constantly bedeviled by bitterness and often wind up turning out mean-tempered, ill-mannered vehicles. Townsend has avoided that pitfall and produced some very funny commentary on our society in general and our media in particular, especially insofar as those media provide opportunities for minorities.

Townsend produced "Hollywood Shuffle" out of the back of his van and financed it with his acting earnings ("A Soldier's Story," "American Flyers") and by taking advantage of the credit cards that come in everyone's mail.

WORKING UNDER those circumstances, with a strong sense of personal worth, he produced the story of Bobby Taylor (Townsend), an aspiring young, black actor who supports himself working for the Winky Dinky Hot Dog Stand run by Mr. Jones (John Witherspoon).

Bobby's mother (Sisterella Dupels), grandmother (Helen Martin) and kid brother, Stevie (Craig R. Johnson), are each, in their own way, supportive of his aspirations, although Grandma would rather he worked in

the post office than perform stereotyped black roles.

That's the conflict Taylor faces throughout the film, especially when he finally gets his "big" chance, a major but demeaning role.

What makes "Hollywood Shuffle" so appealing is the technique by which Townsend has Taylor deal with the conflict. As we all do, Bobby takes refuge in fantasy, daydreams, television — all means to deal with the pressures of life.

Townsend and his editor, W.O. Garrett, are extremely effective in utilizing the motion picture's capacity to travel anywhere the imagination takes it. Unlike so many films that self-consciously employ dream or fantasy sequences, "Hollywood Shuffle" just does its thing without pretense or elaborate technology.

AND ITS "THING" is very funny, including a television commercial for "Black Actors School," send-ups of hard-boiled private-eye movies, black-exploitation movies, Siskel and Ebert and, of course, Stallone, in a trailer for "Rambo, the First Young Blood."

It also has important points to make. Among them, when the white writer of Taylor's demeaning role says: "Don't blame me, I learned about blacks from television."

TOWNSEND'S LEAN good looks and happy demeanor in Hollywood

the movies



Dan Greenberg

are counterbalanced by Burt Reynolds, who keeps cranking out flabby, middle-aged movies about tough guys on the downside. If you liked "Heat" earlier this year, then look for "Malone" (R), opening Friday.

This time out, Reynolds plays a former CIA assassin who wanders into a small town being taken over by a right-wing survivalist group. Naturally, Reynolds saves the day.

On a more serious note, No. two in the Vietnam movie parade debuts Friday. Francis Coppola's "Gardens of Stone" (R) is the story of a hardened Vietnam vet serving with Arlington Cemetery's Honor Guard. James Caan, Angelica Huston, James Earl Jones and Dean Stockwell head an all-star cast.

Also somewhat in the Vietnamese genre but not with the serious tone of

"Platoon" is "Steele Justice," debuting Friday. This is an action film about a veteran who takes on the Vietnamese mafia in Los Angeles. Sounds terrific, huh?

"Gothic" at the Maple beginning Friday is billed as a nightmare derived by Ken Russell from the imaginations of the 19th-century poets Shelley and Byron.

Finally, for the youth market, "Allnighter" (PG-13) is a contemporary comedy tracing the antics of graduation week at a seaside college.

On a heavier note, "Hot Pursuit" (also PG-13) features John Cusack and Robert Loggia in a romantic adventure about a teen-ager's efforts to rescue his girlfriend's family from drug-runners. Ah, dreams of glory!



Anne-Marie Johnson is Lydia and Robert Townsend is Bobby in "Hollywood Shuffle," a story about a young man's striving for Hollywood stardom.

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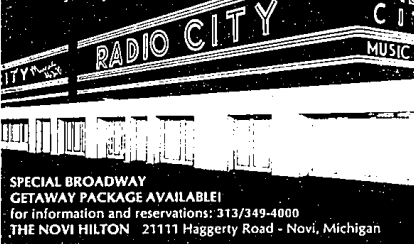
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