

MOVING PICTURES

'Triangle' gives other side of war

Two comedies and an unusual Vietnam war movie highlight this week's additions to your local marquee. Well-known stars appear in all three as the spring film season gains momentum.

There have been so many Vietnam war movies that they now form a special film category sufficiently large, and books and articles are being written about them.

For the most part, these films are "Rambo/MIA" blood and thunder epics which subconsciously try to explain away the war or the "Full Metal Jacket/Hamburger Hills" "war is hell" variety. Some exceptions are films, such as "Platoon" which project a moving portrait of war's tragedy and "Coming Home's" sensitive handling of veterans' problems. Set in a corner of the Ho Chi Minh trail, "The Iron Triangle" (R) (B) is a graphically brutal film based on the diary of a Viet Cong soldier. The story is narrated by American Captain Keene (Beau Bridges) and the cast includes Hanoi Ngor who won an Oscar for his role in "The Killing Fields."

The film shows the other side of



the movies
Dan Greenberg

the war through the eyes of Ho (James Ighide). Both he and Keene have their reasons for being soldiers — the latter because his country called and 17-year-old Ho thinks he's helping his people regain their pride and their land.

But war changes people and no one is left untouched. Through unusual circumstances, which to some may seem unrealistic, both Ho and Keene have an opportunity to kill the other, but a meeting of their eyes stops the trigger finger each time. While such coincidences are not beyond belief, the story suffers by not explaining why, even when Ho asks Keene why.

In the end, no matter from whose viewpoint the Vietnam story is told, war is brutal and depersonalizing — and getting worse all the time. "The Iron Triangle" demonstrates that death is no longer an emotional, personal, moral tragedy.

In our cynical, violent times, death of other human beings has become just another political act — an act which only stimulates outrage and retribution if the "other guys" do it. But if our side, which ever one that is, murders, it's OK. Reviewed by Kathy Guyer.

This week's two new comedies feature a roster of well-known performers. "Her Alibi" (PG) (B) 90 minutes, represents that latest slick, high-concept film that entertains but doesn't make it on the all-time charts.

Clearly producer Keith Barish ("Sophie's Choice," "9½ Weeks" and "The Serpent and the Rainbow"), figures he's worked in every genre and it's time to mix them all together. While the idea of a spy-detective-defectors-on-the-lam-writer's block-

Grading the movies

A+ Top marks - sure to please
A Close behind - excellent
A- Still in running for top honors
B+ Pretty good stuff, not perfect
B Good
B- Good but with notable deficiencies
C+ Just a cut above average
C Mediocre
C- Not so hot and slipping fast
D+ The very best of the poor stuff
D Poor
D- It doesn't get much worse
F Truly awful
Z Reserved for the colossally bad
* No advanced screening

comedy-murder-mystery is unusual. British and director Bruce Beresford ("Tender Mercies") come close, but don't quite pull it off.

Detective novel writer Phillip Blackwood (Tom Selleck) hasn't been productive since his wife left him and his career is suffering despite editor Sam Dusen's (William Dafoe) help. Arthur Miller's sister, Joan Copeland, appears in a neat cameo as Mrs. Dusen.

But nothing much helps Blackwood until inspiration strikes in the lovely form of police prisoner Nina Ionescu (Pauline Portikova) who is being arraigned for murder. Stricken by her beauty, Blackwood provides an alibi and she is released.

Suspicious police Lt. Frank Pollito (James Farentino) complicates matters as does Romanian agent Troppa (Hurd Hatfield) and others hovering around poor Mr. Blackwood and his love-lorn writer's block.

It's cleverly done as Selleck voices over the exploits of Blackwood's super-detective hero while Selleck himself stumbles through numerous complications. But the quick shifts from comedy — some of it overly broad — to suspense and back again is poorly paced. Ms. Portikova is lovely, but Selleck's handsome visage and super-efficient "Magnum P.I." persona make it difficult to believe all this tumbling around.

Nonetheless, the production is slick and there's a good deal of fun to be had.

"Who's Harry Crumb?" (PG-13) (D+) 85 minutes. It's John Candy playing a big, bumbling inept private detective trying to solve a kidnapping. He wants to be a master of disguise, to be clever, to be a great detective. He wants to be funny. He really tries, but he just doesn't make it.

The major problem is that Candy isn't Inspector Clouseau, but he tries the gags anyway. Peter Sellers with a thin black mustache and French accent was likable and humorous. John Candy's bright red hair and good old boy accent don't have the same appeal.

Peter Sellers was brilliant. John Candy tries hard but his timing and performance fall short.

One bright spot is Annie Potts as the sexy, conniving, money hungry stepmother of the kidnapped girl, Jennifer (Reece Cleoman). With her tennis pro boyfriend, Potts tries to kill her husband in order to inherit his money before he gives it to the kidnappers.



Beau Bridges plays Captain Keene, an American infantry commander fighting for survival in Vietnam saga "The Iron Triangle."

Jennifer's younger sister, Nikki (Shawnee Smith) is another bright spot as the befriends Harry and becomes his sidekick. She and Potts are good, but not good enough to help this film.

As Harry notes, "I'm my own crumb; I'm not like the others." He's right, the others are funny. Reviewed by Kathy Guyer.

STILL PLAYING:

"The Accidental Tourist" (C+) (PG) 120 minutes.

Slow-paced family melodrama. "Beaches" (A+) (PG-13) 120 minutes.

Bette Midler and Barbara Hershey in fine show of friendship. "Child's Play" (B-) (R). Horror story about possessed doll given as a birthday present.

"Crossing Delancey" (A) (PG) 95 minutes. A liberated, young New York gal, but grandma has Old World ideas.

"Dangerous Liaisons" (C+) (R) 115 minutes.

Even lush images and good acting can't overcome the non-cinematic quality of this boring story of pre-Revolutionary French decadence.

"Deepstar Six" (*) (R) Underwater aliens.

"Dirty Harry Scaudreir" (B+) (PG) 100 minutes. Super-slick con men on the Riviera are lots of fun.

"I'm Gonna Get You Sucka" (C+) (R) 85 minutes. Slow-paced satire of B-movies from the black point of view.

"The January Man" (B) (R) 95 minutes.

Clicked but slick detective story with big-name cast.

"The Land Before Time" (A) (G) 75 minutes. Touching story of a group of young dinosaurs. Excellent animation.

"Mississippi Burning" (A+) (R) 130 minutes.

Brilliant political film about human greed, fear and cruelty. A must-see.

"My Stepmother is an Alien" (B+) (PG-13) 108 minutes. When extra-terrestrial Kim Basinger touches down, this comedy takes off.



Paulina Porizkova plays accused murderess Nina Ionescu in Warner Bros. comedy-thriller "Her Alibi."

VIDEO VIEWING

Discovering documentaries

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

The latest entertainment blockbuster or an old movie favorite — that's what we normally pull off the video shop shelves. Seldom do we think of documentaries as entertaining so you may be surprised to learn there's lots of excellent entertainment in that section.

Travelogues may not seem enticing unless you're planning a trip to exotic lands, but the filmed record of violinist Isaac Stern's 1979 trip to China should appeal to all with its vivacious attitude, brilliant music and inspiring testimony to the strength and courage of the human spirit.

"From Mao to Mozart — Isaac Stern in China" (G-rated, 84 minutes) won the 1981 Oscar for best feature-length documentary and traces world-famous concert violinist Stern's trip with pianist David Golub who appears in concert, in master classes and in travel with Stern.

The film, full-length recreation film shot in China after the Cultural Revolution, "From Mao to Mozart" is a fine tribute to Stern's virtuosity

and an inspiring testimony to man's spirit.

One such example is the director of a Shanghai music conservatory who suffered during the Cultural Revolution. His graphic testimony of life in a closet and other terrors of that period demonstrate the strength and courage human beings are capable of.

THE POINT here is well taken that music — and by extension all of the arts — can sustain us in trying times.

Seldom-seen views of China, Stern's superb playing, and his ebullient, cherubic persona create a happy 1½ hours for your home screen.

In the same good spirit, "The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!" (PG, 1982, 78 minutes) is a musical documentary recording that folk group's rise and fall against the background of McCarthy-era America.

Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman as "The Weavers" were responsible for popularizing folk music in post-World War II America, in particular their songs of "Goodnight, Irene" and "This Land Is My Land."

But those years trembled to Senator McCarthy's demagoguery and no

one was safe, least of all people like "The Weavers" who spoke out for the environment and for the poor and oppressed.

"Wasn't That a Time!" chronicles their tribulations as well as their successes and concludes with their triumphant 1980 Carnegie Hall concert.

Arlo Guthrie, Holly Near, Don McLean and Peter, Paul and Mary appear in song and in tribute to "The Weavers," testifying to their great good humanism and their tremendous musical inspiration to performers everywhere.

DESPITE the oppression of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the anti-communist hysteria of America 40 years ago, the human spirit rises in joyful song. As Carl Sandburg noted, "When I hear America sing, the Weavers are there."

"From Mao to Mozart" — Isaac Stern in China and "The Weavers: Wasn't That a Wonderful Time!" — are two musical documentaries that will amuse, entertain and warm your hearts with their good spirits.

But more important, they testify to that marvelous capacity that we all possess, our ability to struggle, to survive and to love.

Get your tickets before they all disappear!

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ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

AFTERNOON FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information.

"Kameradschaft" (1931), 1 p.m. Feb. 7-12. APT's German Cinema during the Weimar Republic series continues with G.W. Pabst's film about Germans rescuing French workers from a mining disaster in the Ruhr Valley.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information.

"Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 10-11 and 5, 7 and 9 p.m. Feb. 12. Spanish director Pedro Almodovar is hot, hot, hot right now and this comedy of contemporary sexual manners is said to be his best yet.

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY, Detroit Public Library, 3201 Woodward, Detroit. Call 832-4048. (84 at the door. DFS membership available).

"Casablanca" (1943) with "It Happened One Night" (1934) at 7 p.m. Feb. 10-11. "CS" is, of course, the "Rocky" but the cat brain generation, while "It Happened One Night," Frank Capra's Oscar-winning romantic comedy, is the film in which Clark Gable revolutionized male intimate fashions by appearing without an undershirt.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330.

"The Legendary West" (1976), 7 p.m. Feb. 8, with "When the West Was Young" (1932). The documentary "Legendary West" reveals the truth behind the myth of the Wild West. "Young," with Randolph Scott, is a prime example of Hollywood's western myth-making.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY, Cinema 200, 201 Dodge Hall, Rochester. Call 870-2020. (81 all seats).

"The 400 Blows" (1959) 7 p.m. Feb. 11. French director Francois Truffaut's funny, tragic masterpiece about a neglected little boy running wild in Paris.

TELE-ARTS, 1540 Woodward, Detroit. Films shown Wednesday through Sunday. Call 943-2918 for full schedule information. (81 matinee, students and senior citizens, \$3.50 regular).

"Casablanca" (1943). Glistening evening gowns, palm frosts, glamorous World War II propaganda film ever. Directed by Michael Curtiz, with Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid and whatever other European refugees wandered onto the set.

"Tamopo" (1987) Celebrated comedy by Japanese filmmaker Juzo Itami, about an ambitious restaurant owner's

quest for the perfect noodle.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-ANN ARBOR: A select listing of showings by campus film societies. Locations: Auditorium A, Angell Hall, 435 S. State; Eastern Language Building, 815 E. Washington; Natural Science Auditorium, 830 N. University; and Hill Street Cinema, 1429 Hill St.

"Ashes and Embers" (1983), 7 p.m. Feb. 7, Angell Hall. With "No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger" (1988) at 9 p.m. "Vietnamese," a documentary by David Loeb Weiss, chronicles black American opposition to the Vietnam war. (\$2.50 single, \$3.50 double feature).

"Wild Strawberries" (1957) 7 and 10:30 p.m. Feb. 10, ML3. With "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955) at 8:40 p.m. Two of Swedish master Ingmar Bergman's best. "Strawberries" is a haunting "Christmas Carol" like tale of an elderly doctor's spiritual renewal. "Smiles" is a satirical romantic fever about the re-partnering of a group of mismatched lovers. (\$2.50 all seats).

"Hellraiser" (1987) 7 and 9 p.m. Feb. 10, ML3. Best-selling horror author Clive Barker wrote and directed this excitingly original gore-fest about a woman who kills to bring her lover back to life. (\$2.50 all seats).