

MOVING PICTURES

'True Believer': Law and order, justice at a price

Imagine William Kunstler for the defense and George Bush for the prosecution and you've got James Woods' new legal thriller, "True Believer," (B+) (R) 105 minutes.

Eddie Dodd (James Woods) is a '60s-style liberal, crusading attorney noted for defending radicals. But he's gone sour and claims government prosecution of drug-dealers is endangering the Bill of Rights and constitutional freedom. So every low-life pusher is a potential client.

The decay of his idealism and his cynical pessimism is quite a shock to a recently hired, junior colleague, University of Michigan law school graduate Roger Baron (Robert Downey, Jr.).



the movies
Dan Greenberg

vigor and he undertakes, at no little cost, the defense of Kim.

In the exciting process, Dodd tangles with Manhattan D.A. Robert Heynard (Kurtwood Smith) who bears some resemblance to President Bush — that's what got me going on the William Kunstler versus George Bush track.

The film postulates justice at any price versus law and order at any price — a scary thought but that may be where it's at these days. At least it's well done and entertaining.



Sheryl Lee Ralph stars in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's murder mystery, "The Mighty Quinn."

Sheryl Lee Ralph was in town promoting "The Mighty Quinn" (C), (R) 90 minutes, which would be a lot better movie, if she were more evident and if someone had troubled to write a decent script.

Ralph has an exciting presence that isn't apparent — except for two songs — in this slow, cliched story of Xavier Quinn (Denzel Washington), police chief of a remote Caribbean island and his friend, Maubee (Robert Townsend). Murder, money and spies are jumbled up and don't help much.

Scorey music track and Ralph are terrific, but Quinn ain't so mighty.

"The Barbs" (D) (PG) 95 minutes — are blobs in this absurd, slow and misplaced attempt to satirize horror films.

They use it all up in the first 20 minutes with some pretty decent slapstick, introducing Mr. and Mrs. Ray Peterson (Tom Hanks and Carrie Fisher) who live on Mayfield Place in suburban USA.

Neighbor Mark Rumsfield (Bruce Dern) is a Vietnam vet whose head is still in the jungle. Peterson, Rumsfield and a third neighbor, Art Wein-



James Woods is Eddie Dodd, a lawyer who opens an old murder case in Columbia Pictures' "True Believer."

garter (Rick Ducommun), are suspicious of new neighbors, the Klopiaks, who live in an "Adams Family" type of house.

Evils: If you stick with this one, you probably won't care what's in the Klopiaks' basement. Bruce Dern and Corey Feldman turn in credible performances, but Hanks seems up-tight. *Reviewed by Kim Brown.*

"Bill & Ted: Excellent Adventure" (B) (PG) — Bill and Ted face a problem. They must earn an A+ on their final history report.

No problem, dudes, just create a time-traveling extravaganza, featuring eight legendary historical figures. Along the way, we see Genghis Khan trade his club for a baseball bat and Napoleon in his skivvies.

Alex Winter's Bill and Keanu Reeves' Ted plan the most awesome band of all time except they don't know how to play any instruments. Well, don't let reality get in the way. This is a movie about good times, big dreams and rock'n'roll.

Winter and Reeves acquit themselves nicely, even if the "valley boy" talk gets old much too soon. George Carlin in a cameo, leads the boys into their time-traveling phone booth with a certain new wave panache.

The problems in this film will be recognizable only to people under 18, which is fine, because "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure" is pitched in their direction. *Reviewed by Sue Flichem.*

STILL PLAYING:
"The Accidental Tourist" (C+) (PG) 120 minutes.
Slow-paced family melodrama.
"Beaches" (A+) (PG-13) 120 minutes.
Betie Midler and Barbara Hershey in fine show of friendship.
"Cosmo" (A-) (PG-13) 115 minutes.
Charming romantic comedy about life, love and marriage.
"Dangerous Liaisons" (C+) (R) 115 minutes.

Even lush images and good acting can't overcome the non-chronic quality of this boring story of pre-Revolutionary French decadence. "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" (B+) (PG) 100 minutes. Super-slick con men on the Riviera are lots of fun.
"Her Alibi" (B) (PG) 90 minutes.
This murder-mystery-spy-deflective-detective-writer story is well-done but too much.
"I'm Gonna Get You Socka" (C+) (R) 85 minutes. Slow-paced satire of B-movies from the black point of view.
"The January Man" (B) (R) 95 minutes.
Cliched 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) 115 minutes.
Brilliant political film about human greed, fear and cruelty. A

VIDEO VIEWING

"Never So Few" — a 1962, unrated epic (PG and C+) by today's standards) — runs for 125 minutes and takes its title from Winston Churchill's praise of the RAF during the Battle of Britain. Filmmically, we might amend Churchill. Never have so many parachuted in so much to such minimal effect.

Recently released on video cassette, "Never So Few" doesn't fulfill the promise its star-studded cast suggests, but it's fun nonetheless. Where else can we see how all our aging favorites looked 27 years ago,avoring behind Japanese lines in early World War II Burma?

Captain Tom Reynolds (Frank Sinatra) — with his good friend, English Captain Danny DeMortimer (Richard Johnson) — leads a band of Kachin guerrillas harassing the Japanese from the jungle. The Kachin leader, Nautang, is played by then well-known actor Philip Ahn.

Directed by John Sturges, "Never

So Few" resembles many big-budget war movies with star-laden casts. Sinatra's guerrillas include sergeants John Danford (Charles Bronson) and Jim Norby (Dean Jones), Corporal Bill Ringa (Steve McQueen) and Captain Greg Travis (Peter Lawford). Brian Donley is General Sloan. All essentially play themselves in personal cameos for these under-developed roles.

But the film is only marginally about World War II. It's really about Hollywood's competition with television.

In the former category, Hollywood in the '50s and '60s tried to recapture its media market share from television by doing what television couldn't. That meant wide-screen, color and spectacular images. Television in those days was black and white and, as always, small.

"Never So Few" fits the formula with lush, exotic scenery and a big romance as Sinatra woos the stock

character, "mysterious foreign woman," Carla Vesari (Gina Lollobrigida), with only occasional forays into battle. Carla keeps company with the wealthy, but shadowy Nikko Regas (Paul Henreid).

Surprisingly, the big-screen images translate fairly well to the home screen although nothing beats an 80-foot expanse of Lollobrigida in Burma.

"Never So Few" also represents a happy, plastic moment early in the Kennedy era when Korea was forgotten and Vietnam was yet unknown.

"Never So Few" may not match the quality of Sinatra's other early '60s film, "Manchurian Candidate," but it is interesting and entertaining in its own slow grandeur. After all, hunky lines and corny scups from the old days are fun.

Where else can you hear Sinatra say, "I got the message. I kissed you, lady, and you kissed me back."

Nowhere, I hope.

SCREEN SCENE

AFTERNOON FILM THEATER, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (All seats)
"Robin Hood" (1938), 1 p.m. Feb. 21-26. Director Irving Thalberg's study of a young woman and her family who become homeless during Germany's post-war economic depression. Directed by Slatan Dubrovnik, with Herta Thellie.

DETROIT FILM THEATER, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (51 all seats)
"Salaam Bombay!" (1987), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 24-25 and 5 and 7:15 p.m. Feb. 26. Director Mira Nair used authentic settings and a mostly non-professional cast in this affecting portrait of a small boy finding for himself in the mean streets of urban India.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 303 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 669-5397 for information. (4 regular, \$2.25 for students and seniors)
"Mondo New York" (1988), 8 p.m. Feb. 20-9 p.m. Feb. 21, 7:15 p.m. Feb. 22 and 2:10 p.m. Feb. 23. Harvey Keitel's "shockumentary" about the grotty goings-on in New York's fashionable nightclub scene.
"America — at the Movies" (1978), 7 p.m. Feb. 21. American Film Institute's bicentennial tribute uses scenes from 83 movies, from "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to "Five Easy Pieces" to recreate the American experience.
"Bird" (1988), 9:15 p.m. Feb. 22. Clint Eastwood's controversial bio flick about the great jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, with Forest Whitaker and Diane Venora.
"Rebel Without a Cause" (1955), 9 p.m. Feb. 24. A loosely alienated bad boy (James Dean), a disenchanted daddy's girl (Natalie Wood) and a mad puppy shooter (Sal Mineo) team up in Nicholas Ray's epic of adolescent rage, passion and despair.

"Oliver and Company" (1988), 5:15 p.m. Feb. 25. Roll over, Charles Dickens. Animated Disney feature recast "Oliver Twist" as a funny animal story.
"Without a Clue" (1988), 7 p.m. Feb. 23. In which it is revealed that Sherlock Holmes (Michael Caine) is really a numbskull, and Watson (Ben Kingsley) is the smart guy who secretly feeds him his lies. Hal Hal!
"PARK THEATRE," 804 Erie St. E., Windsor. Call (519) 971-9983 for dates and time (4 regular and \$2.50 seniors, children and members).
"Big Time" (1988). Concert film starring Tom Waits, the Al Jolson of the "Wooder Years" generation.
"The Thin Blue Line" (1988). Errol Morris' documentary about a man unjustly convicted of murder in Texas is the most elegant piece of muckracking in this world.

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 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

must-see.
"My Stepmother Is an Alien" (B+) (PG-13) 108 minutes. When extra-terrestrial Kim Basinger touches down, this comedy takes off.
"Naked Gun" (D) (PG-13) 90 minutes. Overly broad farce never gets off the ground floor of the police squad room.
"Oliver and Company" (A) (G) 70 minutes. Disney animation at its best.
"Physical Evidence" (C+) (R) Burt Reynolds is a cop with a nifty attorney, Theresa Russell.
"Rain Man" (A+) (R) 130 minutes. Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman star as brothers in every sense.
"Scrooged" (B+) (PG-13) 90 minutes. Updated romp through Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."
"Tap" (C+) (PG-13) 105 minutes. Nice dancing, but trite story with Sammy Davis Jr. and Gregory Hines.
"Tequila Sunrise" (B+) (PG-13) 115 minutes. Slick, glib production gets lost trying for high-concept, high-tech look in an old-fashioned, hard-boiled detective story.
"Three Fugitives" (A-) (PG-13) 95 minutes.

Touching comedy about a tough guy, a little misfit and his cute daughter.
"Torch Song Trilogy" (B) (R) 122 minutes.
Sensitive, touching but questionable look at homosexuality.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

'Bombay': Persuasive expose

By Anne Sharp
special writer

The dark side of childhood seems to be a major theme at the Detroit Film Theatre this season. The vicariously ridden brat in "Murmur of the Heart," the abused farm boy in "Pelle the Conqueror" and the apartheid-wary South African youths in "Voices of Sarafina" are all touching in their tragically premature knowledge of the rotten ways of the world.

Add to this list "Salaam Bombay!" a sad, affecting portrayal of childhood as it shouldn't be lived — but unfortunately is — on the streets of urban India.

"Salaam Bombay!" is the story of Krishna, a small boy learning to fend for himself in the city after being cruelly cast out of his family home. Like "Pelle the Conqueror," he is handsome, brave and good-hearted. Unlike Pelle, he has no one in the world who cares about him, and no hope for escape into a better life.

Krishna scrapes by selling glasses of tea in the red-light district where he lives. He makes friends with Chillum, a pathetic adolescent dope peddler hooked on his own product, and Manju, the neglected little daughter of a prostitute.

He gets a crush on a pretty little girl recently bought by a local brothel and watches in dismay as she is transformed into a frightened virgin into a compliant whore.

OVER AND OVER, innocence is violated and slimy exploiters profit by it. The film is very tender toward the plight of the young protagonists. You might call it sentimental. If you were heartless enough.

If the incidents and characterizations are a bit melodramatic, even overly familiar, it's all for a good cause. This is a persuasive expose of a social system that allows children to be used and disposed of, like helpless domestic animals, at the whim of adults.

It's an indictment that's disturbingly close to home. The gritty cityscapes inhabited by Krishna and his cohorts look distressingly familiar. There's no exotic Third World aura to distance us; these events could easily be taking place in New York or Los Angeles.

There's outrage expressed in this film, but it's laid on with a gentle hand. Although Krishna's life is unpleasant, it's not mped to seem completely unbearable. Director Mira Nair shows glimpses of the things that make street life tolerable — the

gaudy luxuries enjoyed by the young prostitute, and Chillum's joyous bashful grin in a greyed-out moment.

Nair makes effective use of location settings and a cast of mostly non-professional actors, many of whom were actually living the life she depicts. It would be nice to think movie stardom has bettered their lot, but that's apparently not the case. Shafiq Syed, who plays Krishna, has reportedly returned to his previous existence as an ordinary child.

GRITTY REALISM aside, this is a gorgeous film. Sandi Sissel's cinematography recreates a child's eye view, giving a sense of freshness and wonder to Krishna's world of alleyways and back streets.

What ties it all together is Indian jazz master L. Subramanyam's super raga-funk score, which combines traditional Eastern instrumentation and melodic lines with a rousing back beat that throbs pleasingly against Western drumtrums.

"Salaam, Bombay!" will be shown at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 24-25 and 5 and 7:15 p.m. Feb. 26 at the Detroit Film Theatre, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. All seats are \$5. Call 832-2730 for information.

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