

# MOVING PICTURES

## Writers deserve to get 'Greivous Bodily Harm'

The spring season is well underway this week, albeit in a number of cases the screenwriters' minds have been fatally flawed by a fungus from Frankfort.

"Greivous Bodily Harm," (D-, R, 95 minutes), concerns crime reporter Tom Stewart whose murky relationship with a police sergeant led to a book used by literature instructor Morris Martin, who doesn't believe that his wife, Claudine, is really dead.

Don't get cocky if you got all that because that's just the tip of the iceberg of a story frozen in the dark reaches of muddled minds. There are five murders, another dozen or so characters (did I tell you about the big robbery?) plus other complications.

The abrupt editing keeps viewers on their toes and no matter how carefully one listens the mumbling and/or Australian accents make it impossible to figure out all the details (Did I mention the noted screw who make porno videos?) There was some perverse fun in trying to figure it all out (I couldn't) and in waiting around to see whether



the movies

**Dan Greenberg**

or not everything was explained (it wasn't). "Greivous Bodily Harm" should be done to the screenwriters of this confused and confusing Australian movie.

If you thought that was bad... wait... "Dream a Little Dream" (F, PG-13, 110 minutes) is worse. Mr. Mrs. Coleman Etlinger (Jason Robards and Piper Laurie) are in the back yard one night doing a mystical hockey-poke when a couple of teenagers (Meredith Salenger and Corey Feldman) jump into each other (literally) and interfere with the Etlingers' cosmic stuff.

Harry Dean Stanton is Jason Robards' friend and, naturally, Corey Feldman's buddy is the other Corey (Haim). The entire proceeding is dead. Unfortunately, the corpse kept wigging through almost two

hours of disorganized cliches — slow-paced ones at that. Only masochists and isomniacs need apply to this little hallucination.

On the brighter side of film production, almost no happy in its message about conditions in Black America, "Lean On Me" (A-, R, 100 minutes) is an excellent rendering of the true story of Joe Clark (Morgan Freeman). Clark was appointed (for political reasons) to straighten out things at Eastside High in Patterson, New Jersey. His unorthodox methods work, but at considerable cost, and even his good friend and supporter, school Superintendent Dr. Frank Napier (Robert Guillaume) has trouble stomaching Clark's tactics.

The film is outspoken, as it should be, in its condemnation of the political and economic processes that have trapped Black America in cities surrounded by white suburbs.

The film manages quite successfully to project that message without preaching or getting sappy, although Clark makes it seem easier than it is, but since this is supposed to be a true story, perhaps truth is stranger than



After being expelled Thomas Sams (Jermalino Hopkins) pleads with his high school principal Joe Clark (Morgan Freeman) to give him another chance in Warner Bros. "Lean On Me."

fiction. That, however, doesn't relieve filmmakers of their obligation to make it look credible.

For the most part they do, by good acting, fast-paced and an energetic, inspirational sound-track. It's good entertainment and despite a happy, comic facade, "Lean On Me" is frank and outspoken about our treatment of minority students in inner cities.

A number of films are opening with well-known performers, but with no advanced screening: "All's Fair" stars George Segal, Sally Kellerman, Robert Carradine, Lou Ferrigno and Jane Kazmarek in a story of a young woman executive in conflict with her male colleagues.

"Khaljit" ("Forbidden Subjects") is more Charles Bronson's R-rated violence. This time he's a veteran detective with anti-Asian bias.

"Skin Deep" (R) is a comedy about an author who finds his marriage is collapsing because he is irresponsible, drinks too much and chases women. With John Ritter.

**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 the show of friendship.

"Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure" (B-) (PG-13) 90 minutes.

George Carlin gives the boys the

key to a time-traveling, A-plus history project.

"The Barbs" (D) (PG) 95 minutes.

Tom Hanks in slow-paced, absurd satire of horror films.

"The Chocolate War" (B+) (R) 105 minutes.

Thought-provoking story of high-school students selling chocolates door-to-door.

"Cousins" (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-cinematic 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.

"The Fly II" (R).

Bad genes notwithstanding, our hero's still hovering.

"I'm Gonna Get You Sucker" (C+) (R) 85 minutes.

Slow-paced satire of B-movies from the black point of view.

"The Land Before Time" (A) (G) 75 minutes.

Touching story of a group of young dinosaurs. Excellent animation.

"Lucky Siff" (PG)

A beautiful woman takes a 300-pound man home for dinner — her family members are cannibals.

"The Mighty Quinn" (C-) (R) 90 minutes.

### 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

Murder, money and spies in the Caribbean.

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

Brilliant political film about human greed, fear and cruelty. A masterpiece.

"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.

"Rain Man" (A+) (R) 130 minutes.

Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman star as brothers in every sense.

"Tap" (C+) (PG-13) 105 minutes.

Nice dancing, but trite story with Sammy Davis Jr. and Gregory Hines.

"The Terror Within" (R)

This plague came from beneath the Mojave desert.

"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.

"Twins" (B+) (PG) 95 minutes.

Do you believe Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger are twins?

"Who's Harry Crumb" (D+) (PG-13) 85 minutes.

John Candy is, but not very well, thank you, in this detective-comedy.

"Working Girl" (B) (R) 115 minutes.

Obstacles on the road to success in Big Business.

## VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg staff writer

The recently released video cassette of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" (A, 125 minutes) was never rated, but it's a "G" by any standard and the kind of family entertainment that leaves nice warm fuzzy feelings.

A fairly faithful rendition of Betty Smith's novel, it's the saga of a poor, but proud Nolan family who live in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn around 1910.

The patriarch, Johnny Nolan (James Dunn), is an engagingly filled with blarney as one might expect of an Irish singing waiter. Unfortunately, he drinks up most of his earnings and his embittered wife, Katie (Dorothy McGuire), is forced to support the family as best she can.

Johnny's bad habits don't interfere with daughter Francie's adoration. She's marvelously well-played by Peggy Ann Garner whose long, wistful gazes and determined facial set is readily convincing that she shares Johnny's dreams. Unlike many child performers, Garner does more than look cute.

TED DONALDSON, brother Neely, is the typical "cute movie kid," but nicely so. Lloyd Nolan is appropriately stiff and proper as the neighborhood policeman, while Joan Blondell tops off the cast as Aunt Sissy, Katie's fast — or at least what passed for "fast" among the prim and proper 80 years ago — blonde sister. Blondell is brassy in the best sense of the term with plenty of warmth for everyone.

Although James Dunn's portrayal of the good-hearted, but misdirected father, his charming, the film really belongs to mother and daughter. Dorothy McGuire and Peggy Ann Garner are the hub of activity which centers on Dunn. But it is conflict over his vision of life which energizes their performances and, for that matter, the film itself.

McGuire is the practical mother whose entire existence is devoted to survival while Peggy Ann Garner is consumed by her father's dream of the potential for improvement.

Ella Kazan directed and, particularly for a first effort, is very successful. Plot and setting, and the book, from which they are drawn, have the potential for maudlin sentimentality.

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" easily could have degenerated into saccharine soap opera, but Kazan kept a tight rein on the proceedings and the

film. The unexplained inconsistency is German-accented Grandma Rommery (Ferike Boros) in an Irish family. As it turns out in the book, Katie and Sissy are Austrian. Dorothy McGuire's slight brogue further confuses this issue.

The standards of Hollywood's studio days, when location shooting was largely unknown and artificial studio settings were the order of the day, are in evidence here.

FOR TODAY'S visually sophisticated eye, "A Tree" may look a bit stilted — the idealized, sanitized Hollywood image of New York's melting pot. For 1945, however, those images were the "state of the art."

The tightness of Kazan's direction keeps the film on track, and its potential for silliness never materializes. Instead, by virtue of excellent characterization and constant iteration that life does grow and flower, even in Brooklyn, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is joyful and inspiring.

What makes this tape so attractive today is it successfully celebrates life's happy and courageous moments without cloying, surgically sentimentality.

## ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

### Needed: More Ken Russell

By Anne Sharp staff writer

Critics have never been happy with Ken Russell. He's just too damn weird, that's all. He's pretentiously high brow and at the same time smirkingly sleazy.

Watching "Gothic" or "Salome's Last Dance" is like attending a graduate seminar in comparative literature held in a Windsor strip club.

Who does he think he is, making up sicko, surrealistic fantasies about Oscar Wilde, Lord Byron, Tchaikovsky and other poor, defenseless dead people? And he does it all the time!

Last summer, a reviewer for the "Village Voice" called Russell "the Thing," as in "the Thing strikes again!" "Wild Thing, I think I love you."

It's a pity that so many viewers are only familiar with Russell from his most tame, commercial films, such as "Altered States," or if they're doddering old fans like myself, "Tommy." Still, this seems to be changing.

"Lair of the White Worm" had a surprisingly long first run and is now friskily making the rounds of alternative cinemas (it's at the Park this week). You can get "Salome" and "Gothic" at the corner video store (right, Dan?), and I've also seen "Litzomania" and "The Music Lovers" on tape. "Women in Love" and "The Devils" have shown up on Bravo.

Of course, you should never watch Russell on video, if you can see it on the big screen instead. His films are made to send you staggering out of the theater, dazed and shivering.

SO MANY things are possible in movies. They can dazzle us, frighten us or make us physically ill. Ordinary filmmakers hold back on the full range of effects available, only letting loose in certain areas clearly labeled horror, science fiction and so on.

Russell has made only two horror films — "Altered States" and "White Worm" — but even in his movies



The poet Byron prepares to conduct a séance with his frightened guests in Ken Russell's horror drama "Gothic."

about 19th century writers and composers, there's a bit of the old creep show. Russell may go mad at any minute.

Trouble is, he's really only good when he's mad. The scenes in "Crimes of Passion" where Anthony Perkins does his crazed street preacher routine are amusing, but when the film cuts away to its subplot about a nice suburban couple getting divorced, it's horribly dull.

SIMILARLY, "WHITE WORM" goes numb during the bits about its cute, normal young heroines and heroes, but starts stirring again when Amanda Donohoe slinks in with her fangs, episcurus and Noir Leather-like underwear.

Your local English teacher might shriek in outrage over the bizarre things Russell shows Lord Byron and Percy and Mary Shelley doing in "Gothic." But for all its opium swirls, leech swallowing and naked frolics over the rooftops, it's probably closer to how these rebellious young writers really carried on than the "cultural literacy" crowd would care to admit.

Similarly, Russell's segment in the opera video omnibus "Aria," in which a car crash victim's wounds appear, in her fevered imagination, as multicolored jewels, violates our sentimental "Reader's Digest" ideas about what injured people think and feel. Still, there's an element of truth, or uncanny beauty, in this strange vision.

RUSSELL HAS always been ahead of his time, and now it seems his time has come. While many films from the '60s and '70s seem dated, his seem amazingly fresh and relevant. And every new Russell film is a truly excellent adventure. It's gratifying that so much of his work is available, at least on tape.

But what about such rare gems as "Mahler" and "Savage Messiah"? We can't just let them mold away in some vault. Are you listening, film societies?

It's time for a Russell retrospective. We need spectacle. We need a furious burst of glittering lunacy to fill us with terror, pity and delight. We need more, more, more of the Thing.

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