

MOVING PICTURES

'N.Y. Stories'
has the best
of everything

"New York Stories" (A+, PG, 130 minutes) is this week's top film, with Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese each contributing a short story about their New York backgrounds. All three are marvelously well photographed and accompanied by superb music, although Allen's use of "I Want a Girl" may be a bit obvious.

The photography, by the world's top cinematographers — Nestor Almendros, Vittorio Storaro and Sven Nykvist — is particularly noteworthy for its exposure and filtration set to render rich, sensuous, expressive images — every frame a visual pleasure. The directing and acting, as well, are fine tuned to perfection as these three stories present life in New York's last lane.

Scorsese's contribution, "Life Lessons," features a successful, but bedeviled artist, Lionel Doble (Nick Nolte). He's fixated on himself as an artist and on young girls who stare off the specter of age.

His current paramour/assistant is Paulette (Rosanna Arquette). Together they represent the quintessential obsessive-compulsive New York art world.

Part two of this trilogy is Coppola's charming story that has very little to do with flutist/father Claudio (Giancarlo Giannini) or photographer/mother Charlotte (Talia Shire).

"LIFE WITHOUT ZOE" is very much about life with Zoe (Heather McComb), a precocious young lady who just happens to be clever and sensible enough to save her parents' marriage.

"Oedipus Wrecks" is the funniest



the movies

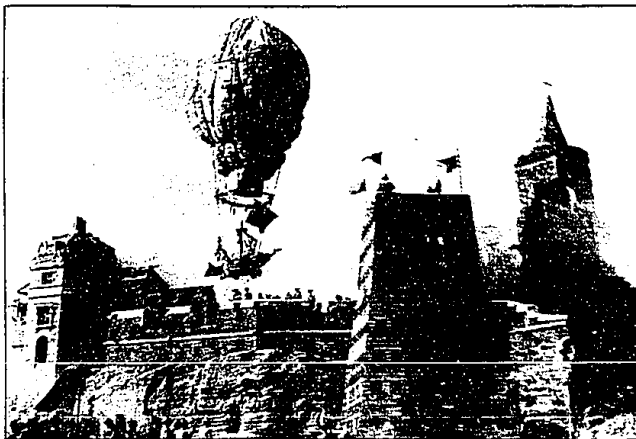
Dan Greenberg

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

of the three, with Woody Allen reverting to his earlier absurdist comic style, this time cleverly and incongruously set in a very realistic midtown Manhattan.

Sheldon Mills (Woody Allen) is a



A balloon, made from ladies' silk lingerie, carries Baron Munchausen (John Neville) aloft on his quest for allies to fight the sultan's army in "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen."

successful, 50-year-old attorney who still hasn't resolved his maternal relationship.

Unlike Allen's recent works — "Purple Rose of Cairo" and "Hannah and Her Sisters" — "Oedipus Wrecks" has a somewhat pessimistic, downbeat conclusion. Not to worry, it's still very funny.

"Life Without Zoe" is unlikable, and all three teach "Life Lessons" very well.

"The Adventures of Baron Munchausen" (A, PG, 126 minutes) is a delightful, magical alternative to the realism of New York. Terry Gilliam

"Brazil Without Zoe" is unlikable, and all three teach "Life Lessons" very well.

There really was a Baron Munchausen — and I don't mean Jack Pearl's radio character of the '30s.

Karl Friedrich Hieronymus, Freiherr von Munchausen (1720-97), was a cavalry officer who served Frederick the Great of Prussia.

When he retired, he sat around drinking and telling fantastic tales of his battles with the Ottoman Turks. One of his drinking companions, Rudolf Erich Raspe, went to England in 1785 and published what soon became a best-selling comic satire of the baron's adventures.

TERRY GILLIAM has built a marvelous fantasy on these stories as Baron Munchausen (John Neville) appears in the Theatre Royal in an 18th century city, besieged by the Turks. The Henry Salt Players are performing "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen," when the real baron appears to tell it like it was — or like he wished it had been.

Henry Salt's (Bill Paterson) daughter Sally (Sarah Polley) believes the baron's improbable stories and inspires him to gather his old companions and save the town.

But he and his friends have aged and weakened. Albrecht (Winston Dennis) may no longer be the world's strongest man nor is Berthold (Eric Idle) still the fastest. Adolphus (Charles McKelvey) vision has dimmed and Gustavus (Jack Purvis) can no longer blow harder than any hurricane.

But they have their memories and the faith of a young girl — which is the point of this marvelous adventure. The baron travels to the moon, to the belly of a monster — in fact, to the outer realms of imagination with his power restored by her faith.

The effects are special indeed, and it's easy to see where the \$45 million went. Imagine what it would have cost, if all of Gilliam's fantasies had been filmed. Unfortunately, business interests reined in the production, forcing cuts of several major scenes. The many that remain, however, are distinctive.

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" (C-) (R).

Bad genes notwithstanding, our hero's still hovering.

"I'm Gonna Get You Sacka" (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 Stiff" (C) (PG).

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

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

Murder, money and spics in the Caribbean.

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

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

VIDEO VIEWING

Devoles of madcap, zany humor ought to check out the Marx Brothers' comedies, all of which are now available on videocassette. Some have been around for a while, although the one I screened, "Horse Feathers," was released late last month.

But starting with 1930s, "Animal Crackers" and "Duck Soup" through 1931's "Monkey Business," "A Night at the Opera" (1935), "A Day at the Races" (1937), "Room Service" (1938), "At the Circus" (1939), "Go West" (1940) right down to Groucho's solo performance in "Copacabana" (1947), it's the best of Marx brothers, with support from Margaret Dumont, Thelma Todd, Eve Arden, Maureen O'Sullivan, Lucille Ball, Carmen Miranda and many others are at your videocassette recorder fingertips.

The fourth Marx Brothers' comedy, "Horse Feathers" (A, 87 minutes), considered by some to be their best, originally was released in 1932. The script by famous humorist S. J. Perelman, features a non-stop barrage of visual and verbal humor at its zaniest.

THE FILM wasn't rated, but is clearly a G by today's standards. Its

musical score by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby includes Groucho's theme, "I'm Against It" plus Zeppo singing "Everyone Sees I Love You" — with several reprises including one by Groucho in a cameo. And, of course, Harpo solos on his harp.

The technical quality of this tape is quite good, at least for 1932, although the voices are strident by today's standards and there is one rough spot where sound and picture don't match up. That's not enough, however, to interfere with viewing pleasure.

Marx Brothers' films were unrelenting in their comic attack on social institutions and got tremendous laughs with their play on language — "You got a haddock, take an aspirin" — and by deflating the pompous.

In "Animal Crackers," they let the air out of Mrs. Rittenhouse's (Margaret Dumont) social pretensions; "Duck Soup" devastates war and fascism with, among other pointed routines, "All God's Chillun Got Guns."

"A Night at the Opera" includes the famous scene with 30 people crammed into a small cabin aboard ship.

Of all their wild gags, my favorite is a quieter one which comes half way through "Horse Feathers" — when the Dogcatcher, Pinky (Harpo), responds to a gambler's "cut the cards" with a hacket.

Brother Chico is Ara Bravelli, the bootlegger, and the two of them wind up playing for Huxley College's beleaguered football team. Another teammate is Frank Wagstaff (Zeppo), son of the Huxley College president, Professor Quincy Adams Wagstaff (Groucho).

ZEPPU, ALONG with everyone else, is missing around with the "college widow," Connie Bailey (Thelma Todd), who also hangs out with Jennings (David Landau), the conniving backer of arch-rival Baldwin University.

However, it's not the plot line that's intriguing. It's the madcap anarchy of language and action as the Marx Brothers demolish education — try Groucho's anatomy lecture — and sports — the Lions should score so easily.

That's what grabs you as the Marx Brothers romp in their own, inimitable and disrespectful style. They sure knew how to make people laugh in those days.



Claudio (Giancarlo Gianni) and Charlotte (Talia Shire) easily fall under the spell of their charming daughter in "Life Without Zoe," written by Francis Coppola and Sofia Coppola, part of Touchstone Pictures' "New York Stories."

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 833-2730 for information. (\$5 all seats) "High Hopes" (1948), 7 and 9:30 p.m. March 17-18, 5 and 7 p.m. March 19. Mike Leigh's satirical portrait of a downwardly mobile couple in Margaret Thatcher's Britain.

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, Strong Auditorium, Ypsilanti. Call 487-3045 for information. (\$2 all seats) "Die Hard" (1988) 8 and 10 p.m. March 14-15 and 10 p.m. and midnight March 16-17. Flashy urban action thriller features saucy Bruce Willis as the hero and sultry Anna Ricchman as the villain.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 333-3333 for information. (Free) "Saints and Sinners" (1949), 7 p.m. March 13. An Irishman, unjustly accused of a crime, returns to his home town in order to clear his name.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 601 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 669-4397 for information. (\$4 regular, \$3.25 for students and seniors) "Gone with the Wind" (1939), 7:15 p.m. March 13, 15 and 17, 8:15 p.m. March 14. Fully restored Technicolor version of the classic romance about the life and loves of a Civil War slave-devil.

"Citizen Kane" (1941), 8 p.m. March 14. Orson Welles' notorious, brilliant, thoroughly entertaining drama about the rise and fall of a newspaper tycoon.

PARK THEATRE, 404 Erie St. E., Windsor. Call (519) 971-9183 for dates and times (14 regular and \$2.50 seniors and students) "Bagdad Cafe" (1988), 7 p.m. March 15, 17 and 18, 9:30 p.m. March 16 and 18. West German director Percy (Sugars-

by) Adlon's whimsical comedy about an unlikely friendship between a two-ton German tourist (Marlene Sagebrecht) and the cantankerous proprietor of a desert roadside cafe (CCTI Pander).

"Angry Harvest" (1985), 7 p.m. March 16 and 18, 9:30 p.m. March 15, 17 and 19. Agnieszka Holland's WWII drama about a Polish farmer (Armin Mueller-Stahl) who hides an American Jew (Elisabeth Trissenaar) from the Nazis.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17340 Lusher. Detroit. Call 337-2560 for information. (\$2 all seats)

"Ben-Hur" (1959), 7:30 p.m. March 17-18. William Wyler's spectacular Biblical era epic about a Jewish charioteer (Charlton Heston) who gives the Romans a run for their money.

TELEARTS, 1540 Woodward, Detroit. Call 363-8690 for dates and times. (\$2 matinee, students and seniors, \$3.50 regular)

"What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (1988), 7:30 p.m. March 15-16, 5:30 and 7:45 p.m. March 17-18, 1, 3:15 and 5:30 p.m. March 18. Campy comedy by Pedro Almodovar, director of "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown."

"Cane Train" (1976), 7:30 p.m. March 17-18, 7:45 p.m. March 19. Offbeat Australian documentary about a disastrous attempt to introduce a new breed of beetle-eating froggy types to Australia.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-ANN ARBOR. A select listing of offerings by campus film societies. Locations are Auditorium A of Angell Hall, 435 S. State St., Modern Language Building, 812 E. Washington, and Natural Science Auditorium, 810 N. University. (Prices average \$2.50 single, \$3.50 double feature.)

"Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" (1964), 7 p.m. March 17, Angell (free). Ar-

The baron's adventures are thrilling, rich visual experiences produced by a top team — cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno (Fellini's "Amarcord" and John Huston's "The Bible") production designer Dante Ferretti (Fellini's "Satyricon" and Pasolini's "Arabian Nights"), costume designer Gabriella Pescucci (Fellini's "City of Women" and Sergio Leone's "Once Upon a Time in America"), special effects man Richard Conway ("Brazil") and Spielberg's "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom").

WITH A TEAM like that, expect a fantastic production. You won't be disappointed.

Among the less attractive premises this week "Police Academy 5: City Under Siege" (PG). Such pot-boilers have a built-in audience and earn their keep. From the producer's point of view, they make money, so why bother screening them for critics who have no kind words for this stuff anyway?

"Chances Are" was sneak previewed around this market last week (but not for the critics). This romantic comedy stars Cybil Shepherd, Robert Downey Jr., Ryan O'Neal and Mary Stuart Masterson.

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.

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

George Carlin gives the boys the key to a time-traveling, A-plus history project.

"The 'Burbs" (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.

"Cosmas" (A-) (PG-13) (115 minutes).

Charming romantic comedy about life, love and marriage.

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

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ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

When avant-garde gets old

By Anne Sharp
staff writer

What is avant-garde cinema anyway?

The question arises because there seems to be so much of it going around these days.

On Saturday, for instance, the Cinema Guild of Ann Arbor is showing Jean-Luc Godard's "Weekend," which Current magazine describes as "one of the masterworks of avant-garde cinema."

There's also the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor film and video department's symposium on avant-garde cinema on Thursday and Friday, March 16 and 17, featuring a retrospective of works by Ken Jacobs, who is, according to their brochure, "one of the most innovative and influential avant-garde filmmakers."

Beginning to sound like a broken record here.

Avant-garde is a term that seems to imply something new, something no one's ever seen before. It seems strange, therefore, to apply it to Godard's 22-year-old "Weekend" or to films made by Jacobs in the early '60s.

Is there a certain point where once innovative work becomes an accept-

ed part of regular cinema? Or is the rule "once avant-garde, always avant-garde?"

Another question: Is there a point at which avant-garde itself becomes old hat?

LAST MONTH, for example, the symposium on A-O Cinema brought Stan Brakhage, a member of Ken Jacobs' generation of experimental filmmakers. Watching his presentation was a rather trying experience.

For one thing, Brakhage is one of the most incoherent public speakers I've ever heard. At one point, he seemed to be telling us that narrative drama is the leading cause of teen suicide.

The films he showed were equally baffling. They seemed to be designed as a deliberate antidote to the dramatic narrative — bland, involved, filled with totally forgettable images. People were walking out in droves.

I felt sorry for Brakhage that evening as he bravely babbled over the sound of flaming fire exit doors. It was obvious what was going on.

Here was Brakhage, the stale old modernist, trying to impress us with a rebel, what an innovator he is. Here was his youthful postmodernist audience, who grew up long after people like Brakhage started break-

ing all the rules and were unimpressed.

When broken rules are the norm, you tend to get jaded about innovation. You want something else besides something that's intellectually stimulating but entertaining as well. You want to see a show.

Now Jacobs, from all accounts, is something of a showman. Live performance and special effects are a trademark of his work. And his imagery is reportedly anything but bland.

A-G FILM impresario Jonas Mekas hailed his 1983 work, "Blondie Cobra," as "a work hardly surpassable in perversity, in richness, in beauty, in sadness, in tragedy."

Jacobs himself describes his 1982 piece, "The Whole Shebang," which involves 3-D effects and projectors showing identical films at varying speeds: "A strident elegy to crazy people."

See for yourself. "Cobra," along with other short works by Jacobs, will be shown at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Lorch Hall Auditorium (corner of Tappan and Monroe) on the U-M campus. "Shebang" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Friday. Jacobs will present both nights. And it's free admission.