

MOVING PICTURES

'Sing': Fantasy land of music worth seeing

During distractions such as Easter Week and Oscar night, movie distributors hesitate to introduce new films, but prefer to wait until the hoopla is over.

Most of this week's new fare is marginal stuff — not worth screening for critics, who will just make smart-alecky comments anyway.

"All's Fair" (PG-13), starring George Segal and Sally Kellerman, is one of those films that have been promised off and on again for the past few weeks. It's about how a young woman executes a plan to battle her male colleagues with the aid of disgruntled corporate wives.

"1969" (R) is another old-timer that finally got released. First announced some months ago, it is the story of two small-town teenagers experiencing death, love, family and war as they mature and learn what friendship and freedom is in America.

After spring break comes "Summer Job" (R), which sounds like an adolescent day-dream when 10 college guys and guys land dream jobs at an exclusive Florida resort.

The team that wrote and produced "Poolhouse" (Dean Pitchford and Craig Zadan) present "Slag" (PG-13), which does just that.

And for good reason. Although it's Richard Baskin's first directorial effort, he learned well while writing a successful string of motion picture soundtracks.

Hollywood composers don't get up-front recognition like stars, but you know Baskin's music from "Nashville," "Honeyuckle Rose," "Welcome to L.A.," and "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," plus his co-production credits from Barbara Streisand's "Broadway" album. He also co-wrote Chicago's hit "Will You Still Love Me?"

That musical expertise makes "Sing" a sassy piece of entertainment. The story is the story of every musical — "The show must go on." This time it goes on stage at Brooklyn's Central High School where new teacher and former student Miss Lombardo (Lorraine Bracco), is determined that the junior-senior class competition will go on as it always has.

Desolate neighborhoods, nasty school board administrators, student



the movies

Dan Greenberg

love affairs . . . nothing must stop the show.

The student love affair just happens to be between the co-chairs of the Senior Sing, Hannah (Jessica Steen) and Dominick (Peter Dobson). The latter is a dancing street punk, while Hannah is a very nice girl. Too nice, as a matter of fact. Despite Steen's fine performance, Hannah is too slick, polished and mature-looking for a Brooklyn high school student.

Dobson plays the punk just right, although the makeup department should have treated him a little more for credibility's sake. Hollywood musicals live in a fantasy land where every child and passer-by is ready for prime time.

But it rules sensibilities harshly when the subject is real. In this case, it drugs decaying inner-city neighborhoods, crime and all the problems of urban blight. It's hard to be happy-go-lucky while singing in the urban debris.

Nonetheless, "Sing" is good entertainment with credible acting, excellent singing and dancing. Cecilia, the cheerleader (Rachel Sweet), has a terrific number, "Life Ain't Worth Living (When You're Dead)." The spirit of those lyrics fill "Sing" with joyful energy. Richard Baskin has directed a bright and entertaining show with the music of songwriter and movie composer Jay Gruska.

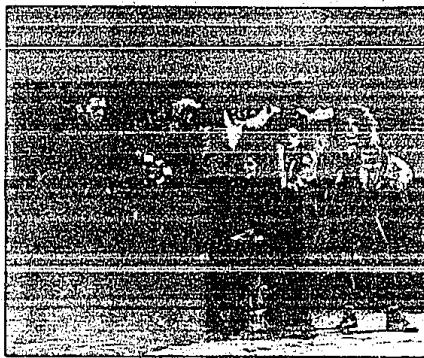
STILL PLAYING:
"The Accidental Tourist" (C+) (PG) 120 minutes.

Slow-paced family melodrama. "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen" (A) PG, 120 minutes.

Marginal fantasy, super special effects and great performances by an all-star cast.

"Beaches" (A+) (PG-13) 120 minutes.

Bette Midler and Barbara Her-



In "Sing," a contemporary musical from Tri-Star Pictures, Dominick Zammetti (Peter Dobson) brings the streetwise talents of the Cheap Chicks to the Senior Sing.

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

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

"Chances Are" (C) (PG).

Cybil Shepard, Robert Downey Jr. and Ryan O'Neal in a romantic comedy about two lives mixed together.

"Comins" (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-Revolution French decadence.

"Dead Bang" (C) (R).

Slam-bang detective story with Don Johnson.

"Fletch Lives" B, PG.

Cherry Chase is back as Fletch and brings along a gang of familiar faces in this mindless, but funny, sequel.

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 colossal bad
*	No advanced screening

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

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

"Klanite" (C) (R).

More violence for Bronson fans only.

"Lean On Me" (PG-13) (A-) 100 minutes.

True, inspirational, intense story of high school principal Joe Clark and his revival of Eastside High in Patterson, N.J.

"Leviathan" (B+) (R) 95 minutes.

Peter Weller is pretty good in a watery nightmare with mutant monster.

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

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

"New York Stories" (A+) (PG) 130 minutes.

Three superior short stories about life in New York's fast lanes directed by Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and Woody Allen.

"Police Academy 6: City Under Siege" (C) (PG).

One's sensibilities are also under siege.

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

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

"The Rescuers" (A) (G) 77 minutes.

Disney animation about two brave mice who rescue kidnapped orphan.

"Roadtop" (D) (R) 95 minutes.

Super-silly dance epic pitting inner-city N.Y. youth against drug dealers.

"Skin Deep" (C) (R).

John Ritter drinks, womanizes and wonders why his marriage fails.

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

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

"Three Fugitives" (A-) (PG-13) 95 minutes.

Touching comedy about a tough guy, a little misfit and his cute daughter.

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

Do you believe Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger are twins?

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

Obstacles on the road to success in big business.

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Hickey-Freeman believes that the end result is only as good as the materials used.

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Hickey-Freeman clothing is unique in character and individuality.

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Hickey-Freeman knows that no detail is too small to be important.

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ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

Puppet master makes 'Alice' a serious fable

By Anne Sharp
staff writer

After witnessing the truly wretched excesses of an overblown special effects blitz like "Baron Munchausen," it's refreshing to see what can be done with a little budget and a bit of genuine creativity.

"Alice" (at the Tele-Arts this week) is that rare thing, a truly original fantasy film. The fact that it's based on familiar material — over-familiar actually — makes its freshness even more astonishing.

"Alice" is the first feature-length effort by Jan Svankmajer, a Czechoslovakian master of the peculiar Eastern European-dominated art of puppet animation in which three-dimensional objects are made to come to life on film through the use of stop-motion cinematography.

These familiar with the work of American puppet animators Stephen and Timothy Quay will experience déjà vu on contact with "Alice." Reportedly, the Brothers Quay learned a lot of their tricks from Svankmajer. A number of grotesque, surrealistic visual motifs from the Quay's "Street of Crocodiles" — dancing hardware, scary antique dolls, crawling slabs of raw meat — surface in "Alice." It's hard to tell whether the master is borrowing from his students, or vice versa.

OVER THE years, we've been told so often that "Alice in Wonderland" is some sort of charming, innocuous children's tale that we've forgotten what potent and often rather disturbing piece of imaginative fiction it is.

By stripping the story to its bare essentials — no beloved bits of familiar dialogue, no visual references to classic John Tenniel drawings —

Svankmajer throws us into a hallucinatory world that's as strange and disorienting for us as it is for Alice.

The kiddie classic becomes a deadly serious fable of a courageous heroine's struggle for survival in a nightmare world "where logic and proportion have fallen softly dead."

Alice herself is portrayed in live action by a real little girl. That is unless she's under the influence of one of the size-altering, eat-me, drink-me snacks, in which case she turns into a porcelain doll.

The wonderland she enters is a surreal landscape in which familiar objects are constantly coming to eerie life. The White Rabbit, for instance, is a moth-eaten taxidermied specimen. The rabbit hole he disappears down is a desk drawer full of drafting equipment.

The denizens of Wonderland are grotesque combinations of old body parts, animal skeletons and weird knickknacks that seemed to have come together from some hellish attic.

THE MAD Hatter is a nasty-looking marionette; the Caterpillar a stuffed knee sock with a pair of eyeballs and false teeth attached.

There's no music and very little dialogue; this adds intensity to the visuals and, in Svankmajer's remarkable narrative style, gives extra focus to the drama unfolding as Alice's pursuit of the hideous stuffed rabbit accelerates from rather hostile beginnings to all-out war.

The really brilliant thing about this film is that, in a sense, it invites us to become Alice. By bringing out the dreamlike, irrational submerged aspects of the old story, by starting our senses with unexpected frights and marvels, it makes old Wonderland a true land of wonder again.