

Reiner, Crystal, Ryan make 'Harry' a winner

When he's good, he's very, very good and at his best Rob Reiner is excellent. His latest, "When Harry Met Sally..." (A+, R, 90 minutes), is without doubt his best, an excellent comic look at marriage and urban singles life in the '80s.

After college graduation, the open, out-spoken, earthy but pessimistic Harry (Billy Crystal) shares a Chicago-New York ride with conservative, over-organized, rigid Sally (Meg Ryan). He's so relaxed, if he didn't have style and intelligence, he'd be a slob while she clearly is the queen of fussbudgetry with a surface coating of false optimism.

An unlikely couple, true, but this saga of their lengthy courtship carefully develops those two personalities, for all their foibles, as warm, loving folks troubled by life and by the pressures of the contemporary urban scene.

Reiner directed Nora Ephron's witty and literate script with fine touch, while keeping the entire production firmly in hand. Taken with superb performances by Crystal and Ryan — plus Carolee Fisher and no Kirby as their best friends — the result is a densely packed 90 minutes. There are no dull spots, no slow-moving moments, just a constantly engaging play with, and between, images flowing swiftly so that the film's experience is intense. There's a lot more than 90 minutes in this 90 minutes.

Reiner's episodic structure — bits and pieces of Harry and Sally's relationship spread over 12 years — are tied neatly together with vignettes of various, unrelated couples posing for golden wedding anniversary portraits while commenting on their marital experience.

IT REALLY is one of the funniest movies in a long time with Crystal and Ryan's superb performances making this Reiner-Ephron collaboration work so well. Billy Crystal is at his very best creating a specific

(F, PG, 98 minutes), an infantile, poorly-paced, boring exercise in distilling the worst of "Beach Party" and "Spring Break" movies.

Screenwriter Robin Swicord, Lanier Lane and Terry Sweeney, with the connivance of Director Zeldia Baran, would have us believe that there were, even among the most conservative elements of the South in 1963, four such silly, naive and clichéd characters as the girls who star in "Shag." Maybe there were, but they sure aren't entertaining. Neither is this film.

Carson (Phoebe Cates), Melina (Bridget Fonda), Pudge (Annabeth Gish) and Luanna (Page Hannah) lie to their parents about a trip to Fort Sumpter in order to sneak off to the Myrtle Beach Sun Festival for their last high school fling.

This alleged satire of social mores and teen contests is heavy-handed and totally unfunny, while the "Shag" dance contest sequences — supposedly the spark to excite audiences — are pretty lame, too.

WEAK CHOREOGRAPHY and weaker still camera work detracts by constantly cutting away from full-shots of the dancers to relatively meaningless close-ups of faces and feet. Of course, they're dancing isn't all that terrific either so maybe it's just as well.

The dancing, the writing, the acting — everything in fact — is lacking vivacity, humor and entertainment.

"Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills" (F, R, 100 minutes) is in the same class. It's also pretentious.

Paul Bartel and Mary Woronov have such a heavy-hand with satire that they are able to take clever ideas — remember "Eating Raoul" — and turn them into dull and embarrassing productions that start well and meander to tiresome conclusions.

This time they didn't start with a



Billy Crystal plays Harry Burns and Meg Ryan is Sally Albright in Rob Reiner's new film, "When Harry Met Sally..."

very clever idea and they relied heavily on crude and infantile material supposedly to comment on the idle rich on the lower west coast. All they accomplished was filming 100 minutes of embarrassingly slow-paced, ridiculous meanderings of a group of unappealing people.

The story-line has two houseboys betting that they can seduce each other's employers, the recent divorcee (Mary Woronov) and the recent widow (Jacqueline Bisset). The seductions have all the grace and appeal of baseball bats and take place on a weekend filled with various fat, fatty crises, strange family members and adolescent, uncredible dialogue. There may very well be people like these in the world, but let's not advertise it.

Satire should be funny and deal with important and engaging human characteristics. It also helps if it is entertaining. "Scenes from the Class Struggle..." is none of those.

"WARM NIGHTS on a Slow Moving Train" (B, R, 90 minutes) is about the choices we make in the face of the choices that are made for us. It's also about hope in spite of hopelessness, despair in the light of loneliness and the sexual manipulations inherent in human nature.

This Australian film features Wendy Hughes as an art teacher who becomes a weekend prostitute and is drawn into espionage and murder. The film is largely successful because of her talents. "Warm Nights..." offers just enough curiosity and intrigue to make a thoughtful diversion for the grown-ups this summer. Reviewed by Susan Finchem.

"Wierd Al" Yankovic has a good sense of satire, particularly when it comes to the media and "UHF" (B, PG-13, 90 minutes), his first motion picture, lets television programming have it with both barrels.

There's some very funny stuff in "UHF" as George Newman (Yankovic) assumes management of Channel 62, a broken-down UHF television station on the verge of bankruptcy. It's also on the edge of town. George's innovative programming — weird is a better description — captures audience enthusiasm and a major market share.

Michael Richards is especially good as Stanley Spadovick, born to be a janitor but successful as a TV star. "UHF" starts slow, includes some gross gags and is a bit to broad

and farcical at times. On the whole, it's enjoyable with excellent comic routines.

STILL PLAYING: "Batman" (C+) (PG-13) 120 minutes. Michael Keaton is a dud in the title role but Jack Nicholson's Joker is terrific.

"Dead Poets Society" (A+) (PG) 124 minutes. Robin Williams' sensitive portrait of a fine teacher is complimented by excellent young actors as his students.

"On the Night Thing" (B+) (R) 120 minutes. Sharp, incisive and entertaining commentary on today's urban America.

"Field of Dreams" (B+) (PG) 111 minutes. Fanciful baseball story as Iowa farmer builds diamond so Shoeless Joe Jackson can play again.

"Ghostbusters II" (C-) (F) 102 minutes. It's less funny the second time.

"Great Balls of Fire" (C) (PG-13) 105 minutes. Jerry Lee Lewis is energetic and entertaining but biography is hokily whitewash of a decadent life.

"Honey, I Shrunk the Kid" (B+) (PG) 105 minutes. It's fun but it ain't easy to be small.

"Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" (B+) (PG-13) 120 minutes. Good entertainment, by enough already.

"Karate Kid III" (D-) (PG) 105 minutes. Boring, clichéd sequel.

"Lethal Weapon II" (B+) (R) 115 minutes. Glover and Gibson do it again in high, albeit violent, style.

VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

If you're looking around for summer entertainment on videotape, try some of Vestron's four new tapes, available July 26. As always, it's a good news/bad news scene.

On the bright side is a delightful hour-long comedy special, first cable-cast in 1985, starring one very funny woman, "Elayne Boozer: Party of One" is a tape worth watching several times.

Although there are a few opening vignettes featuring David Letterman, Bill Cosby, Dr. Ruth, Larry "Bud" Melman and Brother Theodore, the show belongs to Boozer whose stand-up comedy fills most of this tape with laughter.

Quite frankly the "name" draws featured in those vignettes set in a nice urban design may be necessary to sell tapes, but Boozer easily sustains this hour on her own.

As Boozer covers a wide range of topics — dating, food, being single in the '80s, pets, shopping, Ronald Reagan — she draws a clever and appealing view of life in the big city. Her outspoken routines, although deserving of an R-rating, are not offensive as much night-club material is and they offer a light-hearted view of sex, the sexes and sexuality, as well as all those other urban topics.

Don't miss this fun with Elayne Boozer or, for another happy 70 minutes, try "Leo Buscaglia: Give Love." Buscaglia's often dozens of humorous stories, inspirational messages and inclusive view on how to celebrate the joy of life.

ON THE downside, however, is "The Tunnel," billed as a twist on the "Fatal Attraction" scenario. It never fails to amaze me when talented people consent to appear in boring, unpleasant films that are not at all entertaining.

Nonetheless Peter Weller ("Robocop"), "Buckaroo Banzai," "Leviathan," Jane Seymour ("Live and Let Die," the TV mini series "War and Remembrance") and the noted European actor Fernando Rey ("The French Connection I and II") are in "The Tunnel." Weller and Seymour are on screen for most of the film. It's their baby and not a very good one either.

Weller is an artist who becomes obsessed with his lover, Jane Seymour, who is married to Fernando Rey. He was first attracted to her because she was intensely staring at one of his paintings in a gallery. From her intent gaze he knew she understood him. Give me a break.

Part of the problem may be this is

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ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

A look at different worlds

By John Monaghan
special writer

Worlds apart in both content and design, China's "Red Sorghum" and "An American in Paris" still have some similarities. Aside from their striking use of color, both screen at area theaters this week.

"Red Sorghum" (1987), which premiered at the Detroit Film Theatre last season, begins a week-long run tonight at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor. The epic story examines a woman's life and the plight of her native China during the Japanese invasion in the '40s.

As the film opens, a bride prepares for her arranged marriage to a rich sorghum distiller stricken with leprosy. Brilliant details highlight her red dress and the velvet sedan chair which her bearers jostle while delivering snide remarks about the sinister groom.

The husband never appears on

screen nor does the narrator, who we discover is the woman's grandson. The film has the mythic quality of a story handed down for generations as the woman's relationship with a man in the fields takes more than one strange turn. The second half focuses on brutal war and resistance.

Zhang Yimou directed this first feature after great acclaim as a cinematographer. His style draws comparison to Akira Kurosawa and Sergio Leone, who also knew how to use wide screen to both open up a story and close in on a character's psyche.

"RED SORGHUM" has won several awards, including the Golden Bear at the 1988 Berlin Film Festival, where it was hailed as the film that "puts Chinese cinema on the map." More than a glimpse of another culture, it's like a view into an alien world.

The world presented in Vincente Minnelli's "An American in Paris" (1951) is a far cheerier one. Candy colors greet Gene Kelly when he

takes up residence in the City of Lights. The film screens this Friday and Saturday at the Redford Theatre.

"I'll Build a Stairway to Heaven," "Two of a Kind" and "Let's Go Here to Stay" just scratch the surface of George and Ira Gershwin tunes covered.

The highlight remains the 18-minute dream ballet. Here, painter Kelly searches for the woman he loves in various Paris locations, each inspired by Impressionist and Post-Impressionist canvases. The sequence reportedly took six months of rehearsal and a month to actually film, with a price tag of more than \$450,000.

For MGM, it was a landmark, paying the way for other inspired musicals of the '50s. And while the film as a whole may not have deserved all the attention it received at the Academy Awards (best screenplay), it continues to charm audiences, especially on the big screen.

SCREEN SCENE

ANN ARBOR FILM SOCIETY, Bertha Hill, 194 at State, Ann Arbor. Call 761-5255 for information. Starts at 3 p.m. July 30. (\$2.50 general, \$1.50 members).

The society's tribute to classic silent foreign films begins with a stop in Russia, in "Earth" (1930), when a group of peasants band together to buy a tractor, amidst results, a simple plot is overlaid by incredible images. With "Behn Meadow" (1930), a rare film by Sergei Eisenstein, along with a color sequence from his "The Ten Commandments" (1945).

CINEMA GUILD, Modern Language Building, Ann Arbor. Call 994-0277 for information. (\$1.50 single feature, \$3.50 double).

The '50s — "Picnic" (USA — 1950), 7:30 p.m. July 28. Sexy vagabond William Holden blows into a small town just in time for the annual Fourth of July picnic. He leaves the town in an emotional shambles in this worthy film version of the stage play, shown here in CinemaScope. With "Roman Holiday" (USA — 1954) at 9:30 p.m., starring Audrey Hepburn as a pampered princess trying to get away from it all with Gregory Peck.

"Taxi Driver" (USA — 1976), 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. July 29. Martin Scorsese's masterpiece, starring Robert De Niro as the vigilante title character determined to "clean the scum off the streets" of New York.

DETROIT HISTORICAL MUSEUM, 5201 Woodward, Detroit. Call 633-1419 for information. (\$2 adults, \$1 children).

and senior citizens) "Miracle in Harlem" (USA — 1948), 1 p.m. July 29 and 3 p.m. July 30. Steppin' Fetchit stars in this rarely screened comic film, conceived during the museum's ambitious focus on films made with and for black audiences in the '30s and '40s.

FOX THEATRE, 211 Woodward, Detroit. Call 567-7000 for information. (10) "Lawrence of Arabia" (Britain — 1962), through July 30. David Lean's newly restored epic, starring Peter O'Toole as the legendary British soldier T.E. Lawrence. Held over by popular demand.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 19301 Michigan, Dearborn. Call 945-3330 for information. (Free) "Abbott and Costello Night," 7 p.m. July 24. Featuring a collection of comic shorts, including "The Haunted House" (1954).

LIVONIA MALL CINEMA, 29415 Seven Mile, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (Free) "What's the Matter with Helen?" (USA — 1971), 8 p.m. July 23. Macabre thriller with Debbie Reynolds and Shelby Longines try to erase their sordid past by launching a Hollywood school for gifted kids. Concluding the mall's month-long tribute to Debbie Reynolds.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. For information, call 685-8307. (\$4 regular and \$3.25 students and senior citizens) "Red Sorghum" (China — 1988), July 24-29 (call for show times). An epic film

examining the life of a young woman and the tragic turn China takes during the Japanese invasion in the '40s.

"The Last Emperor" (USA — 1987), 9:15 p.m. July 25-26. Bernardo Bertolucci's epic story of Pu Yi, the last emperor of China and his tragic journey from a "20 socialist to political puppet to simple gardener."

"A Room with a View" (Britain — 1986), 9:45 p.m. July 29 and 8:15 p.m. July 30. Acclaimed adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel about a young woman and her aunt swept away by the romance of Florence, Italy.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17360 Lahar, Detroit. Call 537-2560 for information. (12) "An American in Paris" (USA — 1951), 8 p.m. July 28-29. Gene Kelly sings and dances to George Gershwin tunes in this classic MGM musical.

TELE-ARTS, 1540 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 663-3918 for information and show times. (\$2.25 adults, \$3 students and senior citizens) "Promises to Keep," 7:15 p.m. July 23. Narrated by Martin Scorsese, the story of a man's first-year struggle with federal bureaucracy to help the homeless. (55 admission this film only).

"The Navigator" (Australia/New Zealand — 1988), July 25-30 (call for show times). A group of medieval copper miners tunnel through the earth to find themselves in modern-day New Zealand. Winner of an Australian award for best picture.

Ha Ha Ha, Hee Hee Hee,



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