

MOVING PICTURES



'A Dry White Season' — A compelling must see

"A Dry White Season" (A+, R, 100 minutes) is a literate, compelling examination of South Africa's ugly, violent repression of black aspirations for a decent life.

Under the guise of fighting communism and terrorism, the Special Branch, a police counter-intelligence unit, performs every imaginable atrocity against blacks peacefully protesting the government's repressive policies. Of course that's been going on for a long time in South Africa.

What is particularly special in this case is the very fine way in which these issues are personalized. Ben Du Toit (Donald Sutherland) and his family serve as the centerpiece for this South African tragedy. Du Toit — a white Afrikaner who teaches in a ritzy boys school — is propelled into the mainstream first by the disappearance and death of his gardener's son and then by the gardener's death while searching for the truth about his son.

Mrs. Du Toit along with their daughter, son and son-in-law represent various attitudes in the struggle. There are, of course, others in ever widening circles around the Du Toit family, others who have their vested interests and their explanations for the horrors perpetuated by the government.

MOST NOTABLY is barrister Ian McKenzie (Marlon Brando), a round, bitter man who notes cynically that law and justice in South Africa are, at best, distant cousins. Despite his cynicism, he speaks out.

Ben Du Toit's gradual realization that the government regularly lies and mistreats everyone in the name of power and that unspeakable horrors are routine makes "A Dry White Season" a powerful film.

Du Toit evolves from an isolated "nice person" to a hard working activist, an evolution which speaks eloquently for all those in every time and place who have risen above the complacent acceptance which protects sheltered lives and economic privileges.

While everyone around Ben has differing opinions about his crusade for justice, the film is not preachy. It is a formidable and overwhelming statement because attitudes are demonstrated by actions.

All this effectively personalizes what too often is reduced to tragic but abstract headlines. For that "A Dry White Season" is recommended highly to all.

"An Innocent Man" (B-, R, 90 minutes) is also a compelling movie about personal tragedy, but its plot structure, acting and characterizations fall short of the mark.

Jimmie Rainwood (Tom Selleck) is a regular, hard working guy married to a very nice lady, Kate (Laila Robins). Two corrupt narcotics detectives, Mike Parnell (David Basche) and Danny Seale (Richard Young) frame Jimmie as a drug dealer to cover up their mistaken drug bust of the Rainwood home.

THE POWERFUL, effective portion of "An Innocent Man" is its central section where Jimmie must adapt to survive the horrible prison world. Those tense, realistic sequences ought to make everyone wonder about our society and its prisons.

"But 'An Innocent Man' opens and closes with pure adult-Disney stuff and that's not very credible. By the way, this is a Touchstone Film, Disney's 'adult' line. But Tom Selleck's deeply ingrained macho image over-



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

rides the possibility that anyone will believe him as a bland, sit-com husband which is how it all starts out.

The happy ever after ending doesn't fit with the graphic realism of the prison story, a segment by the way where Selleck's macho image works. F. Murray Abraham ("Amadeus" is Virgil Cane, a hardened lifer who befriends Selleck. Only he's a hardened lifer in the Disney World mold and it just doesn't wash, nor do the two corrupt cops who generally seem preoccupied with ethical matters, hardly villainous.

The story is frightening because it's all so plausible. Unfortunately, that plausibility and the powerful central section of "An Innocent Man" are weakened by the first and last sections and by weak characterizations that overwhelm decent acting.

STILL PLAYING: "The Abyss" (D+) (PG-13) 135 minutes. Despite excellent underwater sequences, this muddled and murky sci-fi sea saga sicks.

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

"Black Rain" (D+) (R) 120 minutes. Unpleasant, trite detective story stars Michael Douglas.

"Cage" (R). Two Vietnam veterans involved in cage fighting.

"Casualties of War" (D+) (R) 105 minutes. Grim, gripping and graphically violent story of Vietnam war.

"Cookie" (C+) (R) 90 minutes. A couple of confusing stories run together as mother Peter Falk tries to reconcile with daughter, Cookie (Emily Lloyd) while scamming mob and feds.

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

"Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" (D+) (PG) 105 minutes. It's fun but it's not easy to be small.

"In Country" (B+) (R) 110 minutes. Often poignant, sometimes maudlin story of a young girl searching for an image of her father, a casualty in Vietnam.

"Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade"

(B+) (PG-13) 120 minutes. Good entertainment, but enough already.

"Johnny Handsome" (F) (R) 90 minutes. An ugly movie which proves criminals are incapable of reforming.

"Kickboxer" (F) (R). Vengeance and rescue are in order as an American kickboxer travels to Thailand.

"Lethal Weapon II" (D+) (R) 115 minutes. "Phantom of the Malls: Eric's Revenge" (R).

Glover and Gibson do it again in high, albeit violent, style. "Nightmare on Elm Street V" (R).

"Parent Trap" (A-) (R) 120 minutes. Large, talented cast in complex, but entertaining story about a family which includes Jason Roberts, Steve Martin, Tom Hulse, Martha Plimpton and Diane Wiest, among others.

Morgan Fairchild and others involved in love, horror and revenge. "Judd Nelson, Robert Loggia, Leo Rossi and Meg Foster in story of driven young man who becomes a killer."

"Phantom of the Malls: Eric's Revenge" (R). "When Harry Met Sally" (A+) (R) 90 minutes.

Disturbing and frightening, but provocative story of El Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero and the events leading to his assassination. Superb performance by Raúl Juliá in title role.

"Sea of Love" (C) (R) 110 minutes. Al Pacino as a burnt-out detective adds nothing to the cliché nor does a very weak script.

"Sex, Lies, and Videotape" (R). Everyone's talking about this romantic comedy with James Spader.

"Shirley Valentine" (A+) (R) 110 minutes. Superb, comic, romantic, lovely statement about human worth.

"Turner & Hoock" (D) (PG) 95 minutes. Man and slobbery dog bonding against background of confusion — and confusion — murder investigation.

"Weekend at Bernie's" (C) (PG-13). A one-joke film about convincing boss of insurance company.

"When Harry Met Sally" (A+) (R) 90 minutes. Fine comic, romantic story of an unlikely couple — Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan — and well directed by Rob Reiner.

"Young Einstein" (D+) (PG) 99 minutes. Off-the-wall re-interpretation of history that never realizes its humorous potential.

VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg special writer

The legacy of Lord Laurence Olivier — one of this century's greatest actors — remains for our viewing pleasure on film and video tape. This week HBO is releasing, for the first time on video the 1982 Olivier film, "A Voyage Round My Father."

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VIDEO VIEWING

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

Almodovar's 'Dark Habits'

By John Monaghan special writer

Spanish director Pedro Almodovar is startlingly comfortable with vice — and he makes us feel that way, too. Where Luis Bunuel lampooned religious convention with a satirist's congeniality of a genuflection.

A case in point is his 1984 film, "Dark Habits," premiering this weekend at the downtown Tele-Arts Theatre. It has been released following the success of "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown."

Almodovar may be the hottest European director at work today and here is another reason why.

"Dark Habits" is about a vampish nightclub singer named Lovinda who accidentally murders her boyfriend when she sells him strychnine-laced cocaine. On the lam from the police, she takes refuge in a convent populated by a bizarre sect of nuns.

In some ways, this is Almodovar's remake of "Ball of Fire" — the screwball comedy where Barbara Stanwyck hides out with a group of bachelor intellectuals. The nuns all

bond with Lovinda; one even falls in love with her.

THE NUNS have names like Sister Mamma, Sister Mammoth, Sister Rat of the Sewers. Some entered the convent while fleeing murder raps. At least two are drug addicts. One regularly drops acid; we see from her point of view in psychedelic ultraviolet images.

Another writes trashy romance novels under the pen name of Concha Torres. The Mother Superior makes incredible, gory costumes out of state-of-the-art synthetic fabrics. Her priest helper smokes marijuana on the altar and adores the hats in "My Fair Lady."

But things are not all rosy for the little sisters. When a wealthy benefactor pulls her support, the nuns take to the street and have a bake sale. Then they get hold of an incriminating letter about the benefactor's daughter and try to blackmail her.

Even in Almodovar's early work — this is his third film — trademarks start to appear. His use of color is always a knockout. His im-

ages are awash with unusual tones — green convent walls and blue-bathed light at night — not normally found on a painter's palette.

He pulls some great comic performances from his nuns, even though they begin to look alike under their treatments. Juliette Serrano plays the Mother Superior whose walls are lined with pictures of sexy women.

"JESUS DID NOT die on the cross to save saints, but to redeem sinners," she tells Lovinda while sharing snorts of cocaine.

Marvelously straight-faced and sexy, Christina Pascual plays Lovinda who doesn't look especially surprised at the strange goings on — she's been around. For the Mother Superior's birthday, she sings a spicy Brazilian number, backed by sisters on bongos and electric guitar.

Yes, the nuns of "Dark Habits" are blasphemous, but also very human and likable. And more than most women, they are susceptible to the pain and sorrow of Lovinda's torch songs.

SCREEN SCENE

CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES, 1000 N. 1st St., Ann Arbor. Call 764-4327 for information.

"Love Sumako the Actress" (Japan — 1947), 7 p.m. Oct. 13. A stage director discovers the perfect actress to introduce Buson's "The Doll House" to Japan. With "Women of the Night" (Japan — 1949) at 8:45 p.m. Two sisters are forced into prostitution after World War II. As part of the continuing series of rare Japanese films.

CINEMA GUILD, 1000 N. 1st St., Ann Arbor. Call 994-0027 for information. (\$2.50 single, \$3.50 double feature).

"Harry Lyndon" (Britain — 1975), 7 p.m. Oct. 12. Ryan O'Neal plays Thackeray's roguish hero who has trouble dealing with his effortless success. Showed in wide-screen format.

"La Parole" (France — 1984), 7, 8:40 and 10 p.m. Oct. 14. A lesbian pirates away her former lover from the woman's husband. She, in turn, sends a mystery man named No. 5 to return the fugitive.

Another in a series of films by underrated French director Jacques Dilloux.

"Love Me Tonight" (USA — 1932), 7 p.m. Oct. 15. Maurice Chevalier is a tailor who falls for princess Jeanette Goddard in this delightful Rodgers and Hart musical often cited as one of the best musicals ever made. A Film-Video presentation.

"Monty Python's The Meaning of Life" (Britain — 1983), 9 p.m. Oct. 15. More lunatic skits from the British satirists, highlighted by a disgusting scene with an obese man at the dinner table.

TELE-AIDS, 1540 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 963-3918 for information (\$3.50 for adults, \$2.50 students and senior citizens).

"Dark Habits" (Spain — 1984), 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. Oct. 11-14 and 1, 5 and 7 p.m. Oct. 15. More irreverent fun from Spanish director Pedro Almodovar. A nightclub singer takes refuge in a bizarre convent.

"The Cure in Orange," 9:30 and 11:30 p.m. Oct. 13-14. The English band captured live in concert in L'Orange, France.

"Voice of Sarafina" (USA — 1989), 3 p.m. Oct. 15. An inspirational documentary about the young black acting troupe from South Africa who staged "Sarafina!" at the Lincoln Center. The finale includes an appearance by Miriam Makeba.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN, Recreation Center, 4901 Evergreen, Dearborn. Call 593-5399 for information (free).

"Twins" (USA — 1989), 7:30 p.m. Oct. 11-12. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito play the mismatched title characters in popular comedy.

— John Monaghan

"For Me and My Gal" (USA — 1942), 10 p.m. Oct. 10. Gene Kelly and Judy Garland team up in this Busby Berkeley directed musical about a struggling vaudeville couple during World War II. Kelly's film debut.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. For information, call 665-8377. (44 regular and \$3.25 students and senior citizens).

"My Darling Clementine" (USA — 1946), 7 p.m. Oct. 10-11. Classic John Ford western leading up to the legendary gunfight at O.K. Corral. Henry Fonda as Wyatt Earp, Victor Mature as Doc Holliday.

"Chinatown" (USA — 1974), 8 p.m. Oct. 11 and 7:35 p.m. Oct. 12. Roman Polanski's best film stars Jack Nicholson as a nosy gumshoe who uncovers a water diversion scheme in a bone-dry Depression-era California. With John Huston and Faye Dunaway.

"Do the Right Thing" (USA — 1989), 8:40 p.m. Oct. 12 and 9:15 and 11:40 p.m. Oct. 14. Spike Lee's powerful statement about racial unrest, set in a Brooklyn pizzeria on the hottest day of the summer.

"Manhattan" (USA — 1979), 7:15 p.m. Oct. 14 and 7 p.m. Oct. 15. Woody Allen's most beautifully filmed homage to relationships and New York. In film and white wide screen and set to the music of George Gershwin.

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"Do the Right Thing." Spike Lee's powerful statement about racial unrest, set in a Brooklyn pizzeria on the hottest day of the summer, will be at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor Oct. 14.

Like "It" (1938), "Henry V" (1944), "Hamlet" (1948) and "Richard III" (1956). Although foreign films didn't compete for Oscars at that time, he was awarded a special one for his role as producer, director and star of "Henry V."

Olivier also won Oscars as best actor and for best picture for his "Hamlet" and numerous others as well, including a special one in 1979 for "the full body of his work, the unique achievement of his entire career."

Along with these magnificent efforts in production, direction and acting, starting in 1944, he worked as co-director of the Old Vic Theatre with Sir Ralph Richardson. Later — in 1953 — he served as director of England's National Theatre Company.

Although "A Voyage Round My Father" is one of Olivier's last films and is marred by a number of strange continuity flaws, it in no way compromises his immense talent. If you've never seen his work or if you have and appreciate it — this film can only increase your esteem of him.

CLIFFORD MORTIMER (Olivier) is a successful English lawyer sud-

denly struck blind in middle age. His young son, John (Alan Cox), witnesses this misfortune and his father's subsequent attempts to cope while maintaining his dignity. That process is the centerpiece of young John's life.

All of this is recounted by the mature John (Alan Bates) as he reflects while attempting to come to grips with bitter memories and love of his father. It is not an easy burden because Clifford, after his misfortune, is cynical, irascible and often just downright unpleasant.

Olivier's rendition of that character is magnificent. Despite a nasty streak, Mortimer represents the immense strength of human courage in the face of adversity. With the aid of his wife's (Elizabeth Sellars) eyes, Mortimer continues to practice law.

The film was produced and directed by Alvin Rakoff, adapted for the screen by John Mortimer who originally wrote what apparently is his own personal story as a stage play. "A Voyage Round My Father" was filmed on location in the house where the real Mortimer grew up.

While I would gladly watch this film again to marvel at Olivier's talent, the continuity flaws are bothersome — and unnecessary.