

## MOVING PICTURES

## Newman's good ole boy acting is great in 'Blaze'

Broderick Crawford move over, brother Earl's in town. Not since your 1949 portrait of Huey Long ("All the King's Men") has there been such a good-ole-boy, down-home, thigh-slappin' political performance as Paul Newman in "Blaze" (A, R, 110 minutes).

In fact, Newman's characterization of Huey's brother, Earl K. Long, and his domination of Louisiana politics is warmer and loonier than Crawford's. Maybe Newman will win an Oscar, too.

"All the King's Men" was based on Robert Penn Warren's novel and "Blaze" was scripted and directed by Ron Shelton ("Bull Durham") and drawn from "Blaze Star: My Life as Told to Huey Perry" by Blaise Starr, who appears in a cameo roll.

Both Long brothers were womanizers and that troubled their political careers, but Crawford's Huey Long had a harsh quality. Newman plays Earl as a manly old man who knows where it's at and, as well, that he's losing it. But he still can love, and a good deal of "Blaze" is a pretty nice love story about an old man and a strip-tease dancer, Blaise Starr. "Blaze" is about as historical as any Hollywood product gets and does well depicting Earl's populist appeal in Louisiana.

Involvement with a stripper while at the same time ruffling southern feathers over the civil rights voting issues of the late '50s led to his defeat as governor. He did make a comeback, however, and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1950 just before his death.

SOME MAY quibble at the flamboyant parody of Newman's portrayal of Long's political maneuvering and unseemly obsession with a young stripper. But that's only because today's politics under scrutiny of the news has changed dramatically from the backwoods parish stumping and city ward politics of an earlier era. Newman does it like it ought to be done.

Lellie Davidovich is properly lush and fleshy but also projects an appealing vulnerability as the down-home girl making her way through the sinful city. At one and the same time she has everything and nothing. The entire supporting cast has just the right touch for word-heeling politics at its best — or worst — and, taken with some fine photography by Haskell Wexler, adds up to an excellent film.

"Family Business" (D, R, 120 minutes), starring Sean Connery, Dustin Hoffman and Matthew Broderick, is an interesting premise gone bad. Its one of those comedies that probably looked great on paper but turns out to be a sad excuse on celluloid.

All of the film's best moments are in the trailer. But in fairness to the



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 colossal bad
*	No advanced screening

performers, particularly Connery, the acting is first rate.

THERE ARE three generations in the McMillan family — Patriarch Jesse (Connery), son Vito (Hoffman), both thieves, and grandson Adam (Broderick) who leaves MIT grad school to enter the family business. Sounds clever but the story quickly descends into one long cliché. The dialogue, emotions, self-revelations and ethnic portrayals are trite and without dimension. Clearly, the script is the movie's downfall.

Nonetheless director Signey Lumet shows his stuff by pulling a thoughtful performance from Hoffman and a bolstered one from Connery. Broderick is stuck as the sap trying to understand the rift between father and grandfather. He's a boy genius who turns to crime instead of therapy. C'mon guys.

The major problem with "Family Business" is that you just can't believe any of it and you are left wondering how in the world screenwriter Vincent Patrick thought he'd get away with it. Reviewed by Susan Fincham.

"We're No Angels" (A, PG-13, 110 minutes) is an intriguing comedy set in 1935. It's the ultimate "con" as two convicts, Ne (Robert DeNiro) and Jim (Sean Penn), are forced to join a prison escape. They take re-

fuge in a New England town noted for its local shrine to a by a superb case of mistaken identity wind up as priests in the local monastery.

Matters are complicated when Ned starts having romantic feelings for a hot-tempered local woman, Molly (Demi Moore). The two bogus priests get involved with a lot of good deed doing while trying to escape across the Canadian border.

THIS FINE comedy of errors works well as DeNiro and Penn constantly project the characters' contradictory facets — priest and hood. We're in on the joke and can recognize the humor of the situation while the townsfolk and other monks are hoodwinked by Ned and Jim's fine performance. Of course, those performances affect, and change, their characters, adding another dimension to the film. Good spirited comedy appropriate for the holiday season. Reviewed by Jason Brown.

For the kids of the '90s, the recurring battle of brain versus brawn is a thing of the past. Now the challenge is to conquer computer games. "Wild and Crazy" (D, PG) features three young children on an excursion to win it all in Los Angeles at the National Video Games Championship.

Corey Woods (Fred Savage) and his younger half-brother Jimmy (Luke Edwards) run away from, you guessed it, a broken home and head for the big games in L.A.

Along the way, they join up with a street-smart gal, Haley (Jenny Lewis). If that sounds trite, you can imagine how predictable the rest of it is, proving once again that the goofy kid next door can be a champion.

The film obviously is for younger audiences and features the brand new Super Mario III Nintendo game plus songs by New Kids on the Block. It tries to travel to L.A. with its principals but gets mired down in a thousand clichés from a hundred different movies. Reviewed by Debbie Domm.

## STILL PLAYING:

"All Dogs Go To Heaven" (B+) (G) 90 minutes.  
Well-timed veers back this animated story about Charlie the German Shepherd and his doggy buddies.

"Back to the Future Part II" (B+) (PG) 90 minutes.  
All your favorite time-travelers are in other dimensions once again.

"The Deer" (B) (PG) 93 minutes.  
Excellent nature photography but film often lacks continuity and gets pretty sloppy at times.

"The Untouchables" (D) (R) 120 minutes.  
Unpleasant, trite detective story stars Michael Douglas.

"Crimes and Misdemeanors" (A+) (R) 120 minutes.  
Woody Allen at his best in this romantic comedy about family life with all its joy and sadness.

"Daddy" (B) (PG) 119 minutes.  
Excellent acting by Jack Lemmon, Ted Danson, Zakes Mokae and Olympia Dukakis marred by clichés.

## ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

## Re-evaluating yule classics

By John Monaghan  
special writer

It's a snowy Christmas Eve and George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) leans over a bridge railing, contemplating suicide. A glimpse into a world without him makes him change his mind. He realizes that happiness really is being married to Donna Reed and having a kid named Zerk.

Turn on cable television just about any time this week and you'll see some part of Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946). The quintessential holiday classic has long been in the public domain which means any TV station can show it — again and again.

The downtown Tele-Arts has an alternative. This weekend it screens the 1938 MGM version of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," starring Regi-

nald Owen as Scrooge. It's part of the theater's monthlong tribute to classic films.

Leo G. Carroll and Gene Lockhart provide spirited performances as a ghost who visit Scrooge on Christmas Eve and humble Bob Cratchit, Terence Kilburn, who plays Tiny Tim, now serves as artistic director for Meadow Brook Theatre.

Even better is the 1951 British version, available on videotape. All-star Sin offers a three-dimensional portrayal of Scrooge in what may be the best film adaptation of a Dickens story.

Here's another tip. The movie I never miss at Christmas time (also on video) is Ernst Lubitsch's "The Shop Around the Corner" (1938).

Jimmy Stewart works in a Budapest notions shop. He despises a fellow worker (Margaret Sullivan) until he realizes she is his secret lonely

hearts pen pal.

The film climaxes on Christmas Eve, where the cuckolded shop owner (Frank Morgan) — the Wizard of Oz returns to the shop that has really been his home. It's nearly impossible to keep a dry eye during this one.

There are other titles, of course. They range from the classic "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947) to the grossly overrated "White Christmas" (1954) to the more kitschy "Santa Claus Conquers the Martians" (1964). All are available on videotape.

Meanwhile, there's nothing wrong with curling up for the umpteenth time with "It's a Wonderful Life." George Bailey, the frazzled everyman, has probably done more than anyone to relieve holiday depression. It's a testimonial to the lasting power of movies — and Christmas.

## SCREEN SCENE

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-23300 for information. (Free)

"The NeverEnding Story" (British/West Germany — 1984), 7 p.m. Dec. 18. Mafiro children's story about a boy transported to the world of Fantasia by reading a book. Some amazing visual effects and memorable monsters, but heavy-handed message often gets in the way.

LIVONIA MALL CINEMA, 29415 Seven Mile, Livonia. Call 476-1168 for information. (Free)

"The Fortune Cookie" (USA — 1966), 10 a.m. Dec. 19. Jack Lemmon plays a TV cameraman injured a

football game. Walter Matthau is his brother-in-law, a shyster lawyer who tries to collect big on the accident. As part of tribute to films starring Lemmon and directed by Billy Wilder.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 689-8397 for information. (\$4 regular, \$3.25 students and senior citizens)

"Festival of Animation." Dec. 18-23 (call for show times). New animation from around the world, including "The Hui Fany." An award-winning British entry three years in the making, and "Knickknack," the latest from computer animation John Lasseter.

"The Wizard of Oz" (USA — 1939), Dec. 18-23 (call for show times). The famous classic concludes a successful 50th anniversary run. The yellow brick road never looked brighter than in this glorious new color print.

TELE-ARTS, 1540 Woodward, Detroit. 953-8690. (\$3.50, students-seniors \$2.50).

"A Christmas Carol" (USA — 1938), Dec. 20-23 (call for show times). Regional Owen plays Scrooge in this decent adaptation of the Dickens classic. Populated by memorable MGM actors, including Leo G. Carroll, Gene Lockhart and Terry Kilburn.

— John Monaghan



Paul Newman stars as Louisiana Gov. Earl K. Long, a populist politician known for his "stumping" throughout the state in Touchstone Pictures' "Blaze."

## VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg  
special writer

Orion Home Video has a major holiday promotion on the stands with three recent European films appearing Dec. 21 — "La Lectrice" ("The Reader," 1988, color, R, 98 minutes), "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988, color, R, 88 minutes) and "Field of Honor" (1987, color, PG, 87 minutes). All three have "specially enhanced yellow sub-titles" which are quite easy to follow.

The first two have been running theatrically for quite some time and, as of Dec. 3 "La Lectrice" was still on six screens and "Women on the Verge" on three. What that means is that there are a few art houses around the country still screening them.

That hasn't helped "La Lectrice" very much. After almost eight months running it hasn't caught \$1 million dollar box office. "Women on the Verge" has \$7.1 million to show for almost 13 months on American screens. That's a pretty hefty sum for a foreign film.

But it escapes me why. Despite a pretty funny last half, the film opens with a frantic and confusing pattern. But what do I know? "Women on the Verge" garnered five awards, including best screenplay — its worst feature — at the 1988 Venice Film Festival, most popular at the 1988 Toronto fest plus two best actress awards (1988 European Film and Golden CIAR) for Carmen Maura who plays Pepa, a TV star and voice-dubber for foreign films.

IN THIS CASE, "foreign" is outside of Spain where Pedro Almodovar lensed this story of Pepa and her manly rush to say goodbye to her lover, Ivan (Fernando Guillen), who is pulling up stakes for fresh, if not greener, pastures in the form of a feminist attorney.

Complicating matters, Pepa's friend Candela (Maria Barranco) turns up frightened out of her wits after a wild time in bed with a lover who turns out to be a Shillite terrorist planning to bomb the 10 o'clock flight to Stockholm.

Add to that mess Ivan's son Carlos and his girl, Marisa, who turn up looking to rent Pepa's apartment. They're followed by Ivan's mother, Lucia (Julieta Serrano), a psychiatric patient suffering from Ivan's rejection 20 years ago.

There you have all the ingredients of a good bedroom farce in the best madcap tradition. Unfortunately, it takes most of the film for these relationships to be explained. That, taken with the slow pace — particularly during the first half — spoils the potential impact these complications might ordinarily have.

Hopefully, the other two Orion "classics" — which were not available for preview — are better suited to the local market. "La Lectrice" ("The Reader") stars noted French actress Miu-Miu as Constance who is reading a novel to her boyfriend, Jean.

The novel is about Marie, a charming and sensuous woman who uses her knowledge of literature to read literary selections which fit her listeners' needs.

"FIELD OF HONOR" is a tale of another time when military service was a commodity rather than a duty. Set just before the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the film details one aspect of the French lottery system for military draft.

Pierre Naboulet, the younger son of a widow, has drawn a good number which he proceeds to sell to save his mother's farm. His company is defeated and he finds himself wounded and alone behind Prussian lines. He meets a young boy and the two become good comrades in bad times.

If none of these strike your fancy, you can always get involved in the tape wars and buy a copy of "Batman" — they're selling for as little as \$16.95. Lots of video store owners are upset that they were released so soon (November) and at such a low price (list \$29.95 soon lowered to \$19.95).

Video stores make it on rentals, particularly of major, hit films, but at these prices, instead of the usual \$70 to \$90 introductory charge for major motion pictures, why rent when you can buy?

It looks like the big companies are trying to shake out (and take over) the video business. Once they drive out the small players, it will be easy to raise prices.

But given the insatiable demand for visual imagery in our times, it looks like rental and purchase will continue to fill home screens. It will be interesting to see who ultimately controls the business.

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