

MOVING PICTURES

'Men Don't Leave:' Just a Hollywood soap opera

Soap opera on film may be the new wave of the '90s. First "Stella" gives up everything for her daughter's happiness, then the Widow Iris teaches Stanley to read. Now, in "Men Don't Leave" (B, PG-13, 100 minutes), another widow, Beth Macauley (Jessica Lange), copes with economic woe and raises two sons, Chris (Chris O'Donnell) and Matt (Corey Feldman), after her husband, John (Tom Kizzi), is killed in a construction accident.

In several carefully structured sequences as the film opens, Beth is portrayed as the stereotypical, helpless mother while loving but macho hubby-father, John, wrestles with the younger son, Matt, and is buddy-buddy/one-of-the-boys with teenage Chris. If soap operas are characterized by simple, emotional melodrama, "Men Don't Leave" is off to a good start.

Having been set up thusly, Beth is a much stronger struggle against the room for growth and character is greater. That seems to be the pattern for Lange's roles of late. In "The Music Box," for which she received a best actress nomination, she is a divorced attorney with a young son, forced to defend her father on war crime charges.

As well, in "Everybody's All-American," "Country" and "Sweet Dreams" Lange explores one facet or another of the female forced to mature and accept responsibility as she may fall in love, in one sense or another. After a while, this pattern of dramatic roles tends to appear as a feminist political position.

That is not to say they weren't fine performances by Lange; they were, but they are repetitive unlike the strength and diversity of her roles in "The Postman Always Rings Twice," "Frances" and "Tootsie."

IN ANY EVENT, after John Macauley's death, the family begins to disintegrate. Beth and the boys sell the house and move to Baltimore where their problems mount. Chris



the movies

Dan Greenberg

meets a X-ray technician, Jody (Joan Cusack) in the elevator, and that chance encounter evolves so that Chris leaves "home" and moves into Jody's apartment.

Matt hangs out with Winston Buckley (Corey Feldman) whose family gradually is substituted in Matt's life for his own. Meanwhile, Beth has gotten a job in an upscale food store and is getting a relationship going with an unusual musician, Charles Simon (Arliss Howard).

So there you have enough plot material for at least 13 maudlin episodes. The B-rated, spartan apartment settings are pretty sterile, nothing too grungy enough for the Macauley's down-side status. The film mostly is slow-paced although there are a couple of energetic moments that bring things together, particularly the polka party and whenever Jody takes charge.

Fortunately, the occasional moments of energy and strong supporting performances, particularly Chris O'Donnell, Charlie Korsmo and Joan Cusack, pull the whole thing together. After a while, "Men Don't Leave" grows on you. Have a good one.

Hardy worth mentioning is "Bates Case 2" (*), a film about a disturbing descent into madness. No doubt, "abnormal" describes the film as well as the characters. For the blood and guts fans, Rutger Hauer and Joan Chen are opening this week in "The Blood of Heroes" (*). (R).

STILL PLAYING: "All Dogs Go to Heaven" (B+) (G) 99 minutes. Well-known voices back this animated

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

story about Charlie the German Shepherd and Ichy the Dachshund.

"Always" (B-) (PG) 119 minutes.

Sometimes poignant, sometimes sappy stories of people who fight their fears from death as a spirit. "Back to the Future Part II" (B+) (PG) 90 minutes.

All your favorite time-travelers are in other dimensions once again. "Born on the Fourth of July" (A) (R) 144 minutes.

Touching, graphically disturbing, poignant, frightening autobiography of Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise), a paraplegic Viet

"Courage Mountain" (A+) (PG) 100 minutes.

Heidi's story told in an exciting, entertaining film.

"Crimes and Misdemeanors" (A+) (PG-13) 104 minutes. Woody Allen at his best in this romantic comedy about family life with all its joy and sadness.

"Driving Miss Daisy" (A) (PG) 100 minutes.

Fine acting highlights personal drama of Jewish widow (Jessica Tandy) chauffeur.



On her first day of work, Beth (Jessica Lange) meets musician Charles (Arliss Howard), when he helps her pick up a spilled lunch in "Men Don't Leave."

Bruce Willis is the baby's voice.

"Lose Cannon" (C+) (R) 85 minutes.

Two whacko detectives, Gene Hackman and Dan Aykroyd, with a few screw

balls are occasionally funny.

"Madhouse" (Z) (PG-13) 85 minutes.

Ridiculous, exaggerated beyond belief,

story about house guests. Neither funny nor entertaining.

"Flashback" (B-) (R) 105 minutes.

Lightweight entertainment about 60s

radical Dennis Hopper on his way to jail

and his girlfriend's yuppie FBI Agent

(Kiefer Sutherland).

"Glory" (A) (R) 110 minutes.

The glory of the first black infantry

regiment during the Civil War is captured in this outstanding film.

"Hard to Kill" (*) (R)

Martial arts film.

"Heart Condition" (B-) (R) 95 minutes.

Cinematic, poorly structured story of

pregnant CPA (Krisie Alley) and her

search for a perfect father for her baby.

"Haven" (D) (R) 126 minutes.

Trite, plot contrivances and a weak

script destroy this story of revenge.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

'Train' rolls into the DFT

By John Monahan
special writer

In the opening third of "Mystery Train," a young Japanese couple rolls into a dilapidated train station in downtown Memphis. Their quest — to visit the rock'n'roll shrines of Graceland and Sun Studios.

Memphis, Elvis Presley's hometown, is the physical and emotional hub of writer/director Jim Jarmusch's latest film. Playing this weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre, this may be his most exciting work yet.

Jarmusch himself has pointed out that "Mystery Train" is the final installment in a trio of films, starting with "Stranger Than Paradise" in 1984 and followed by "Down By Law" in 1986. All three deal — to some extent — with foreign-born characters embracing the more bizarre aspects of American life.

Aside from the innocent Jun and Mitzuko, aren't at all disturbed by their grungy surroundings. They spread and reorganize the contents of their ingeniously packed suitcase on the carpeting.

The Italian woman meanwhile gets fed a line (and almost believes it) from a local character who claims to have recently spotted Elvis. Then she shares a room with a neurotic, terminally chatty woman who has just broken up with her boyfriend.

The sound of a single gunshot links

They all end up on the same night in the same fleabag hotel, where the radio is chained to the nightstand and a portrait of Elvis hangs over the headboard.

THE DESK worker is wonderfully underplayed by Screamin' Jay Hawkins whose recording of "I Put a Spell on You" played a major role in "Stranger Than Paradise." As an added in-joke, the voice of Tom Waits (from "Down By Law") introduces Elvis' oldies on the local radio station.

Settled in for the night, Jun and Mitzuko aren't at all disturbed by their grungy surroundings. They spread and reorganize the contents of their ingeniously packed suitcase on the carpeting.

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"Machine Dreams" (West Germany — 1988) 7:30 p.m. A documentary look at man's love affair with the machine. Including profiles of Marvin Mindy, "the father of artificial intelligence," and Shunichi Miura, the Japanese inventor of Marilyn Monroe robot. (A City/With Cinema)

"Penn and Teller Get Killed" (USA — 1989) 9:30 p.m. March 2 (call for show times). The popular humorists in a feature directed by Arthur Penn ("Bonnie and Clyde"). When Penn states on a talk show that someone is trying to murder him, suspicion inevitably falls on Teller.

"Dawn of the Dead" (USA — 1978) 9:45 p.m. Feb. 28. The fashionable rock group captured in a concert film directed by the legendary D.A. Pennebaker.

"Southfield Public Library" (USA — 1989) 9:45 a.m. Feb. 27. A quirky look at the life of famed Western hero (Paul Newman) as told by director Robert Altman. Concluding the mail's month-long tribute to actor Paul Newman.

"Michigan Theater" (USA — 1989) 9:45 a.m. Feb. 27. The 19th annual "Michigan Theater Film Festival" (see page 14) continues with a program of films from around the world. (A City/With Cinema)

"The Adventures of Baron Munchausen" (USA — 1989) 7:30 p.m. March 1. From director Terry Gilliam comes this lunatic, epic adventure about a baronial teller of tall tales who, with Venus, gets blown out of a cannon and even spends some time in the belly of a legendary whale. Great fun.

"Abbott and Costello" — A double feature teaming the popular comedians with Universal movie monsters, starting at 8 p.m. March 2. In the surprisingly clever

"Meet Frankenstein" (USA — 1935), they encounter the wolfman (Lon Chaney Jr.) and Dracula (Bela Lugosi) as well. With "Meet the Mummy" (USA — 1933),

"The Mummy" (USA — 1932) for information. (A City/With Cinema)

"Buffalo Bill and the Indians or Sitting Bull's History Lesson," (USA — 1970), 10

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