

MOVING PICTURES



David Merrill (Robert DeNiro) lashes out at questioning during the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in a scene from "Guilty by Suspicion."

DeNiro shines in 'Guilty'

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

Hollywood is — and always was — a wonderful place. But beneath Hollywood's slick surface, decay, decadence and despair run rampant and largely unnoticed by the general public.

The saddest of those chapters began in 1947 when the House Un-American Activities Committee began investigating communist influence in the motion picture industry. HUAC thrashed around and thrashed the film industry to make political capital — the profit of one committee member — Richard Nixon — is obvious.

So deep were the wounds of the HUAC investigation — and the blacklist that followed once the Supreme Court refused to overturn the Hollywood 10's conviction for contempt of Congress — that only six feature-length films have been made about the subject.

But now Irwin Winkler has written and directed a superb account of that period and the ways in which greed for political power and professional success use fear and destroy lives.

"Guilt by Suspicion" (A, PG-13, 100 minutes) carefully blends the actual players of this sad drama with a fictional target of all the terror HUAC mustered in the name of Americanism.

"Guilt by Suspicion" centers on a fictional character, charismatic, well-regarded director David Merrill (Robert DeNiro), who is named by a colleague under duress.

WHILE EFFECTIVELY representing the political turmoil of the early '50s, the film is at its best de-

pecting the emotional havoc wrought on the individual. The fact that he was a major figure in Hollywood made no difference. Merrill's life and career are destroyed by the accusation. Like so many people of that time, he was "Guilty by Suspicion."

As it constantly swirls around Merrill, the camera emphasizes his tenuous, ever-shifting position at the vortex of these forces. But despite the emotional, political and production qualities, it is DeNiro's bravura performance as a man fighting for his life and career that makes "Guilty by Suspicion" such a worthwhile, compelling film.

The performance is a good reason to tout DeNiro as America's greatest contemporary actor.

There are some abrupt transitions in the film which might have been smoothed over and there is one strange fault quite a few production moments and references are made to the 1953 Marilyn Monroe-Jane Russell film, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." This is bothersome since most of "Guilty by Suspicion" is set in 1951.

Despite those distractions, DeNiro's exciting, entertaining, powerful performance is not to be missed.

Gene Hackman's latest, "Class Action" (C R, 105 minutes) is a disappointing, large-screen "L.A. Law" episode. Hackman and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio are father and daughter. Both are attorneys with daughter reacting to father's bad treatment of her mother. Whatever father does, daughter does the opposite.

HE'S PLAINTIFF attorney in a product liability suit while daughter, employed by large firm, defends evil

corporation which is covering up faulty ignition switch that led to explosion and death of wife and child of Hackman's client.

It's largely clichéd and predictable but Hackman and Mastrantonio hold viewers' attention. It may not be the world's greatest courtroom drama, but it's worth seeing.

ALTERNATIVE MOVIE

Fest highlights experiments

By John Monaghan
special writer

When I visited the screening committee of the Ann Arbor Film Festival at this time last year, it was up to its ears in film canisters. And the bleary-eyed cinephiles still had several more nights of viewing ahead.

This time around, with entry deadlines a month earlier, the atmosphere is a bit more relaxed. Many of the almost 300 entries, according to festival director Vlcek Honeyman, still come in late.

"We didn't want to stay up until two in the morning for six weeks before the festival," said Honeyman, who screens titles in the back room

of her Ann Arbor-based hairdressing salon. "We weren't being fair to many filmmakers because we were

The 29th annual Ann Arbor Film Festival begins Tuesday at the Michigan Theatre and runs through Winner's Night on Sunday. Independent filmmakers from around the world compete in the oldest festival of its kind in North America.

"THERE ARE a lot of experimental films this year, less narratives and more animation," said Honeyman. "To me, they're all little poems."

In the six-minute "What Memphis Needs," L.A. filmmaker Alexis Kra-

silovsky joins images of the Tennessee city with a free-form poem. What Memphis needs, she says, is B.B. King, Beale Street, B.B. guns. What it doesn't need is the death of Martin Luther King Jr.

Stephen Mims' "Aunt Hallie" is an old woman who thinks a spent condom on her front lawn has infected her with a disease. She limits her contact with objects and people and even eats dinner while surrounded

Perhaps the best film of the half-dozen I screened was "Choreography for Copy Machine." Portland, Ore.-based Chel White, whose films have

Please turn to Page 4

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (\$5)

"My Twentieth Century" (Hungary - 1988), 7 and 9:30 p.m. March 22-23 and 4 and 7 p.m. March 24. Beginning with Edison's demonstration of electricity, this free-wheeling new film from Hungary follows a pair of

... from Hungary follows a pair of mixed-up twins, one who grows into a femme fatale, the other into a bomb-throwing anarchist. (\$5/audi-

"Midnight Shadow" (USA — 1939).
1 p.m. March 21, 22 and 24. Two jun-

for detectives (Richard Bates and Buck Woods) pit their resources against an oil company that's not above hiring hit men to obtain oil rights from uncooperative owners. With the short "Boogie Woogie Dream" (USA - 1940), featuring Lena Horne and Teddy Wilson. As part of the DFT's ambitious series of African American Independent films. (\$3.50/recital hall).

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 13671 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (free)

"Rooney" (Britain -1958), 7 p.m.
March 18: An Irish garbage man
(John Gregson) and lady's man tries
desperately to avoid the altar. Barry
Fitzgerald also stars.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (free)

"Knights of the Round Table" (USA - 1954), 10 a.m. March 19. The King Arthur legend recounted once

Please turn to Page 4

Campbell's Soups

1991 TOUR OF WORLD FIGURE SKATING CHAMPIONS

Presented By
TOM COLLINS

OLYMPIC, GOLD, SILVER & BRONZE MEDALISTS

Peggy Fleming
United States

Christopher Bowman
United States

Kristy Yamaguchi
United States

Brestiantanova & Bukin
Soviet Union

Elizabeth Manley
Canada

Gordieeva & Grinkov
Soviet Union

Denise Biellmann
Switzerland

Klimova & Ponomarenko
Soviet Union

Victor Petrenko
Soviet Union

One Performance Only!
Friday, MAY 17 • 8:00 pm
JOE LOUIS ARENA
Tickets: \$35 and \$22.50 on sale now
at the Box Office and all **TICKETMASTER**
including Hudson's and Harmony House
CHARGE BY PHONE
(313) 645-6666
Group Sales Information
(313) 567-474

Pier 1 Imports THE
Observer & Eccentric
NEWSPAPERS
At Joe Louis Arena



Jill Trenary
United States

Robin Cousins
Great Britain

Midori Ito
Japan

Brian Orser
Canada

Martini & Underhill
Canada


 THE LOUISVILLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE
 IS
 The Adventures
 of a Bear
 Called
 Paddington
 The rotter, skatner, and pautner
 Bear from Darkest Peru
 Sunday, March 24 at 1 p.m.

 Michigan Theater
 To Order Tickets Call 668-8397

[illegible]