

MOVING PICTURES



Jimmy Smits as Walter Stone and Ellen Barkin as Amanda (Steve) Brooks star in "Switch," a comedy of sexual manners.

'Switch': A gender bender

Seven Detroit-area theaters premiered something very special in motion pictures Friday night, an independently produced story about the Afro-American experience in Chicago entitled, "Love Your Momma" (D, PG-13, 97 minutes).

"Special" here relates more to the event than to the film itself which may have trouble at the box office and probably won't receive the kind of nationwide regard its author, Ruby Oliver, expects to follow from this test release in the Detroit market.

Oliver, currently on tour promoting her film, stopped at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills last week to discuss "Love Your Momma" with film classes.

She — and her long career operating day-care centers in Chicago followed by her current career as a filmmaker — are truly inspirational lessons proving what an individual can do. "Breaks" and "luck," as often as not, reflect hard work, not divine intervention.

Ruby Oliver has made her own way and made her own film. Speaking about the Hollywood formula, she noted, "You keep saying you don't want that stuff but you keep buying it so Hollywood keeps making it."

"Love Your Momma" is a family film about a contemporary Afro-American family surviving despite life — and society's — many roadblocks.

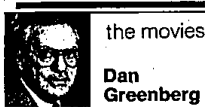
The trouble with the film, despite professional looking sets and camera work, is the amateurish quality of Oliver's writing and direction. People don't talk or act that way and life in or out of the ghetto has more snap, crackle and pop than most of "Love Your Momma." It's all very trite and so slow-paced that yawns are in order.

That doesn't add up to good entertainment which is the name of the box-office game. Despite all that, "Love Your Momma" is an interesting social documentary and a fantastic achievement for an independent filmmaker on her own. It's not easy to produce and distribute feature-length films.

Not since Dustin Hoffman's "Tootsie" has gender turnaround been as well portrayed as in Blake Edwards' newest comedy, "Switch" (A, R, 90 minutes).

CHAUVINIST-WOMANIZER Steve Brooks (Perry King) is done by three vengeful ex-lovers. Brooks is allowed to return to earth and, if he can find one woman to speak well of him, may proceed to heaven. If not, purgatory and Satan (Bruce Martin Payne) will claim another victim.

The Devil is concerned that



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

Brooks charm will work and some unsuspecting gal will fall into line.

To avert that, Satan convinces the Supreme Being to send Brooks back to Earth as a female and Amanda Brooks (Ellen Barkin), in a hilarious scene, discovers "he" is a "she."

Barkin's performance in this role of dual mannerisms as well as the other performances plus an intelligent script result in lots of laughs. Despite, a slightly sappy ending, it's an entertaining, clever film.

Entertaining, but not clever, characterizes "FX — The Deadly Art of

Illusion (C+, PG-13, 105 minutes), a high-concept film with fairly low resolution.

It helps if you remember the first "FX" where special-effects wizard Rolfe Tyler (Bryan Brown) got involved with Detective Leo McCarthy (Brian Dennehy). Whether you saw No. 1 or not, the first half hour of No. 2 is pretty slow in setting up the relationships.

ROLFIE NOW invents and sells high-tech toys in a sleek Manhattan apartment. He's living with Kim Brandon (Rachel Ticotin) and her son Chris (Dominic Zamprogna) whose father, Mike (Tom Mason), is a New York City detective.

Mike, despite Rolfe's help with special effects, is killed while staked out to trap a perverted killer. In the course of investigating Mike's death, Rolfe and Leo join forces again and discover a tortuous and complicated case which involves just about everybody and everything in the western world except Josef Stalin.

Snappy dialogue between buddies in these kinds of films usually is a major source of entertainment, but, with the exception of occasional flashes from Dennehy, most of the dialogue is pretty flat. In fact, the polish and style expected in such films is largely missing here.

The continuity is also weak with a number of loose ends and, by and large, "FX2" is a sterile exercise with Rolfe's clever special effects brightening up the anticlimactic sequences viewers suffer through while waiting for the next explosion.

STILL PLAYING:

"Awakenings" (B, PG-13, 121 min. — Bates)
 Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro as doctor and catatonic patient call to mind too many other films. The doctor's special care and sensitivity and to temporary recovery but film lacks spark expected from these talented actors.

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ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

Re-examining '60s activism

By John Monaghan
 special writer

"We enjoyed a tremendous sense of community," remembers one student fondly. "It's as if all these students are waiting to get together and finally they were."

It began in 1960, when an enclave of students at the University of California-Berkeley joined to protest the actions of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The subsequent banning of such political gatherings on campus led to what

has been called the focal point of student activism in the 1960s.

The acclaimed documentary, "Berkeley in the Sixties," looks back at these turbulent times through archival footage and recent interviews with the people involved. It concludes a two-week run this Monday and Tuesday at the Tele-Arts Theatre in downtown Detroit.

WE SHARE in the filmmakers' discovery of rare film gathered from local television stations, along with familiar clips — students being

dragged limply down flights of stairs to the brutal dropping of nausea gas by helicopter near People's Park.

"Berkeley in the Sixties" introduces us to familiar faces of 1960s, including a singing Joan Baez and a chanting Allen Ginsberg in caps. Black Panther Bobby Seale and Barry Melton, lead guitarist for Country Joe and the Fish, appear both then and now.

The film also recalls politicians like Lyndon Johnson and Richard

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SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM HISTORY OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (\$3.50)

"Sole of Six" (USA - 1949). 1 p.m. May 16-19. A talented Southern guitarist takes up residence in a Harlem rooming house, which he shares with a would-be writer and a con man. Their lives travel separate paths in this conclusion to the DFT's ambitious series of African American Independent Cinema. Shown with the 1948 musical short, "Boogie Woogie Blues."

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL

VIDEO VIEWING

A surprisingly good video clip, "Somebody Has to Shoot the Picture" (1990, color, R, 104 minutes) was released May 9 by MCA/Universal Home Video, and it ought to prove particularly appealing to those who decry the death sentence as inhumane.

But however politically effective the film may be, it's not a pretty picture of death row in Florida where small-time drug dealer Ray Eames (Artis Howard) has spent seven years while the American Civil Liberties Union and others have appealed his conviction and death sentence for the murder of police officer Jack McGrath.

Eames' final request, that his execution be telecast, is denied, but a still photographer is approved. Eames picks Paul Marsh (Roy Scheider), who photographed "Tina"

on the girle calendar in his death row cell.

The photojournalist, Marsh, it turns out, despite his Pulitzer Prize and major reputation, is largely unemployable because he always sees and photographs the grit and grime of life. This bitter-cynicism grew out of grief: His prize-winning photo was of the execution of the woman he loved, shot during a South American revolution.

A LAST-MINUTE reprieve for Eames focuses national attention on his case, and Time Magazine sends reporter Dan Weston (Andre Braugher) to join Marsh and write about the case. As their investigation proceeds, Marsh gets involved romantically with the murdered police officer's widow, Hannah McGrath (Bonnie Bedelia), the one bit of hokey

melodrama that detracts from "Somebody Has to Shoot the Picture."

Outside the prison, pro-and-anti-death penalty advocates protest while Governor Dean (Bob Barnes) uses the case for political purposes.

The photography and performances effectively characterize the tense and tragic questions raised since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in the 70s. Those issues are political as well as moral and include the questions of police power and whether killing a police officer is a special case. Or, are all murders equally reprehensible?

It's a gruesome and graphic picture but somebody has to deal with it.

— Dan Greenberg

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