

pass the popcorn LeAnne Rogers 'Alice': Allen's in 'Wonderland'

The title character in Woody Allen's most recent film, now on video, "Alice" is a wealthy Manhattan housewife who idles away most of her time shopping. This is a woman who seems to have it made — a successful well-to-do husband, a gorgeous home, two children and plenty of domestic help to look after both.

There's another thing Alice, played by Mia Farrow, has and it's a persistent backache. Her physical trainer and masseuse have been no help, nor has she found relief from doctors. Following several recommendations from different people in the same day, Alice heads off to see a Chinese doctor who specializes in herbal treatments and acupuncture.

The sage doctor, played by veteran actor Keye Luke, only has to take her pulse to concede Alice's problem isn't in her back. And he's only heard about her rich, shallow, condescending spouse played by William Hurt.

Through a series of visits to the doctor and different prescribed herbs, Alice begins a journey that eventually leads her to take a hard unflinching look at the person she is, the choices she made for herself and what she wants to do about the future.

What happened to the devout Catholic girl who prayed with her arms outstretched to make it more difficult? How can a woman who says Mother Theresa is her hero spend all her time and resources acquiring material goods?

THAT MAY sound like heavy drama but there is a whimsical quality to the film. Alice has developed an infatuation for a man, Joe Mantegna, whose child attends school with her children.

After taking her herbs precisely as directed, the rather shy Alice makes the gentleman aware of her attraction in no uncertain terms. Farrow's reaction to this is great. You can see on her face the instant the herbs kick in. Mantegna's reaction to her is wonderful.

"I thought someone else was talking... I was like someone possessed," Alice says later when telling a friend about the encounter.

Other pollens from the good doctor render Alice invisible or allow a visit with dead loved ones. Alec Baldwin is very good, although only vaguely seen, as the man Alice loved but broke up with because she was frightened by his recklessness.

Gwen Verdon does a nice job in a couple scenes as Alice's mother, a former actress and alcoholic, unscrupulously romanticized by her daughter. Blythe Danner is very good as Alice's older sister, an attorney who is horrified by her sister's life of conspicuous consumption.

WITH HER color coordinated outfits and matching pillbox hats, Farrow is outfitted like Doris Day in her heyday. I don't recall Doris ever doing so much soul searching, however.

Clearly, there is an "Alice in Wonderland" parallel to the film as she gets bended and shaped by the herbal potions. Thankfully, Allen doesn't beat it to death, like for instance David Lynch's overkill on "The Wizard of Oz" references in "Wild at Heart."

The underlying theme, though, is that there aren't magic potions to solve what's wrong with your life. You have to recognize your weakness and take responsibility for actions before you can move out of an unsatisfying situation. That can be tremendously hard when there is an illusion of everything being as it should. In the end, that's the lesson Alice learns.

Allen's movies tend to fall into his "serious" works and very funny comedies. Alice rather falls in between. There is a lot of humor although not the rapid fire jokes some people might expect from Allen.



William Hurt plays the rich, shallow, condescending spouse to Mia Farrow's dissatisfied Manhattan housewife in Woody Allen's "Alice."

Emotion, irony blend in 'Europa'

"Europa, Europa" views the war through the eyes of a most unusual protagonist. In 1938, on the eve of his bar mitzvah, Solomon Perel flees his native Germany for Poland and later Russia.

Captured by German soldiers, the boy faces a choice — either admit his Jewish heritage and face certain death or lie through his teeth that he is a purebred German. He chooses the latter.


The events that follow in "Europa, Europa" are so unbelievable that they could only be true. The adaptation of Solomon Perel's autobiography, screening this weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre, plays as a consistently fascinating. It sometimes stiff, story of survival in the enemy camp.

Marcel Hoffschneider is convincing as Solomon, or Solly. He's handsome, perhaps too handsome, since much of his frustration in the film involves keeping his circumcized penis under wraps. He is accosted by homosexual soldiers and later seduced by a matronly Nazi and a pretty young frau.

AND HIS identity is discovered, first by a kindly soldier and later by a German widow, "good Germans" who don't turn him in. Director Agnieszka Holland ponders the irony along with her protagonist. How can the Germans, who treat Solly so kindly when they think he's Aryan, so offhandedly hate and exterminate the Jews?

When he arrives at the Hitler Youth camp in Berlin, Solly is already a war hero after a desertion attempt mistakenly leads to a Russian unit. The kids here spend most of their time learning how to identify Jewish vermin and jabbing bayonets into dumplings emblazoned with the Star of David.

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tickets please John Monaghan

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Solly, however, still wants to be what a Nazi commander tells him early on, that the Jews will not

be slaughtered but instead sent to Madagascar or Siberia.

A vivid picture is also painted early in the film of Stalinist indoctrination in the orphanage where Solly spends two years. During the regular session where children must renounce their religious beliefs, a group of Polish Catholics stand firmly in opposition.

"Pray to your God for candy from heaven," demands the attractive Bolshevik teacher. They do and nothing happens. When the other children ask Stalin for the same gift, candy rains down from a hole in the ceiling. Ironically, the orphanage is bombed by German planes at that very moment.

AGAIN THE irony hits you like a bomb drop, making you wonder how much of the story relies on fiction. In interviews, the director swears that most of it is true, "subject to the temporal necessities of dramaturgy."

"Europa, Europa" is not great filmmaking. The writing is unnecessarily heavy handed. Hitler and Stalin wait in Solly's surreal dreams, an attempt to get you into the boy's head that falls pretty flat.

On a purely emotional level, however, as a story of someone forced to hide in plain sight, the film keeps you watching on the strength of its amazing premise.

SCREEN SCENE

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

"Europa, Europa" (France/Germany — 1990), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Sept. 27-28 and 1, 4 and 7 p.m. Sept. 29. In this fascinating true story, set between the explosive years 1938-45, a young German Jew evades the Holocaust by successfully posing as a Bolshevik and later as a member of Hitler Youth.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 12571 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for more information. (free)

"Meeting at Midnight" (USA — 1944), 7 p.m. Sept. 23. One of the better entries in the long-running Charlie Chan series, with Sidney Toler as the famed Oriental detective, uncovering a fake psychic medium.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads, Livonia. Call 476-1165 for information. (free)

"Walt Until Dark" (USA — 1967), 10 a.m. Sept. 24. When psycho Alan Arkin thinks that blind housewife Audrey Hepburn heron stashed in a doll to her apartment, he'll do anything to get it away from her. The satirical thriller concludes a monthlong tribute to leading ladies.

MADONNA UNIVERSITY, 36600 Schoolcraft, Livonia. Call 591-5197 for information (free)

"Romeo and Juliet" (Britain/Italy — 1958), 1:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sept. 24. Franco Zeffirelli directed one of the screen's best Shakespeare adaptations. Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting were only in their mid-teens when they starred as the star-crossed lovers torn apart by feuding families. With Michael York and Laurence Olivier in the prologue.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 540-3030 for information.

"Five Easy Pieces" (USA — 1972), 8 p.m. Sept. 24. Jack Nicholson in perhaps his greatest role as a frustrated musician working on an oil rig who is forced to deal with a depressing family and a Tammy Wynette-obsessed girlfriend (Karen Black), including the explosive "chicken sandwich" scene where Jack gets no satisfaction at a roadside diner. Directed by Bob Fosse.

"Jim" Hendrix on the Isle of Wight (Britain — 1971), 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Sept. 25 and 11:30 p.m. Sept. 27-28. Only recently released to the public, this concert film was recorded just 18 days before the legendary guitarist's death 20 years ago. (\$5 admission)

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 963-6690 for information. (\$5, \$3.50 students and senior citizens)

"The 23rd International Tournee of Animation," through Sept. 30 (all for show times). From paper puppets to clay to traditional cel animation, this annual presentation of international, animated shorts features

nearly 20 new films from a dozen countries. Not as good as previous installments, but still a treat, with highlights including "Ode to G.I. Joe," "Oral Hygiene" and an Xeroxed bit of animation via the Xerox machine.

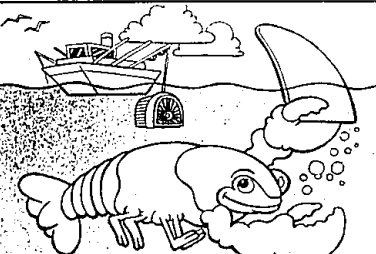
"Rear Window" (USA — 1954), 7 p.m. Sept. 24-25. In this unique twist on the concept of neighborhood watch, James Stewart stars as a photographer laid up with a broken leg who thinks he has witnessed a murder in the apartment across the way. Grace Kelly and Thelma Ritter help him unravel the mystery. This perfect Hitchcock thriller is always worth another look on the big screen.

"L'Atlantide" (France — 1934), 9:30 p.m. Sept. 26 and 9:45 p.m. Sept. 28. Jean Vigo's lyrical story of a newlywed couple and their rough life on a barge was far from successful upon release. The newly restored version has been hailed as a French classic, deceptively simple and poetically rich. A must-see.

— John Monaghan

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