

# Fantasy and imagination fuel an uneven 'Miracle'

In an Irish seaside village, teenagers Jimmy and Rose follow strangers from the train station and fashion elaborate stories about their lives. When a beautiful blond woman blows into town, their imaginations race.

Jimmy thinks she has killed someone and has come here to run away from the crime. Rose considers the story overly melodramatic, but encourages him when he tries to uncover the truth.

The story that follows could have easily fallen into a sappy teenage male fantasy, another 'Summer of

'42.' But "The Miracle" is something else entirely: an often compelling, ultimately disappointing examination of fantasy, reality and the power of raw emotion over solid storytelling.

I was more or less prepared. Irish-born Neil Jordan previously wrote and directed "Mona Lisa," a complex underworld story that offered style over content. "The Miracle," playing exclusively at the Star John R in Madison Heights, is considerably more personal.

THE FIRST half hour hums along



tickets please  
**John Monaghan**

solidly. Niall Byrne and Lorraine Pilkington are extremely entertaining as the two kids bound together by their imaginations. They've tried to develop a romantic relationship, but

are such good friends that kisses leave them cold.

The entrance of Renee (Beverly D'Angelo) shakes things up for both of them. While Jimmy pursues her,

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even prays to a statue of Jesus that he will get her in bed by the end of summer. Rose sets out to tame an animalistic young elephant trainer from the visiting circus.

Renee does have a talented past. You sit there for almost an hour knowing her secret and groaning because she refuses to reveal it to Jimmy. If judged solely on the merits of its script, "The Miracle" would be an all-out flop.

But director Jordan and his talented cast make the best of the often inspired moments, including the musical ones. D'Angelo has a fine voice and belts out a pair of Marlene Dietrich standards from "Destiny Rides Again," a stage version of which brings Renee to town.

The film more or less succeeds in creating a credible relationship between Renee, who is almost 40, and the teenage Jimmy. When she is asked to volunteer a song at an after-show party, he quietly sneaks behind her and accompanies on piano. He possesses an amazing talent for music, as well as a fiery Irish temper.

IRISH ACTOR Donal McGann plays Jimmy's father, a saxophonist with a mediocre bar band. He is both proud and vexed by his son's natural talent and further frustrated when he discovers the object of the boy's affection.

As individuals, and sometimes together, the characters are well-drawn and believable. Ultimately, you have to give the film a lot of breathing room. For me, it helped to consider the romantic melodrama as an altered, hazy product of these teenagers' very fertile imaginations.

## SCREEN SCENE

**DETROIT FILM THEATRE.** Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 332-2730 for more information. (R)

"Blood in the Face" (USA — 1990). 7 and 9:30 p.m. Nov. 1. A powerful new documentary about the radical right was co-directed by Anne Bohlen, production manager on the surprise hit "Roger and Me." Kevin Rafferty of "Atomic Cafe" and Village Voice columnist James Ridgeway also contributed as directors.

"Chameleon Street" (USA — 1990). 7 and 9:30 p.m. Nov. 2. Film's Wendell B. Harris brought the true story of son man Douglas Street to the screen. Street, an intelligent but unorthodox Detroit, successfully impersonated a lawyer, a reporter, and even a surgeon who performed a series of hysterectomies.

"The Killing of a Chinese Bookie" (USA — 1976). 3 and 8 p.m. Nov. 3. Ben Gazzara is the centerpiece of John Cassavetes' style over content. "The Miracle," playing exclusively at the Star John R in Madison Heights, is considerably more personal.

**HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY.** 12671 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for more information. (Free)

"Crypt of the Living Dead" (Britain — 1973). 7 p.m. Oct. 28. A lady vampire who has been entombed since 1269 causes the deaths of those foolishly enough to venture onto Vampire Island. Schlocky shocker has a few good moments.

**LIVONIA MALL.** Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads, Livonia. Call 476-1166

for information. (Free)

"The Quiet Man" (USA — 1952). 10 p.m. Oct. 29. John Wayne in one of his greatest performances as a retired boxer who travels to his ancestral Irish village in the hopes of settling there. His plans are met with resistance from the locals, who want nothing to do with an "outsider." Barry Fitzgerald and Maureen O'Hara co-star in the John Ford classic, concluding a monthlong tribute to leading men.

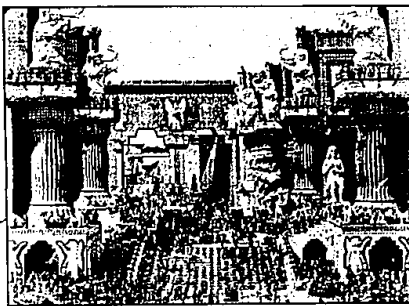
**MICHIGAN THEATRE.** 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 968-6699 for information. (R) \$3.50 students and senior citizens.

"The Story of Boys and Girls" (Italy — 1939). through Oct. 31 (call for show times). Italian director Pupi Avati, who has been making films since 1968, has finally scored an international hit with this story of a grand betrothal dinner where all the participants seem prone to marital spats, lecherous desires and adulterous acts.

"Blowup" (Britain/Italy — 1966). 7 p.m. Oct. 29-30. David Hemmings plays a self-centered London photographer who thinks he has witnessed a murder and tries to use his camera to prove it. Co-starring Vanessa Redgrave and featuring an amusing bit with rock group The Yardbirds.

"Intolerance" (USA — 1916). Nov. 2 (call for show time) This presentation of D.W. Griffith's silent masterpiece, with live organ accompaniment, is the film restoration event of the year. In this grand experiment, four intertwining stories come to the screen with added clarity due to the seven years of restoration efforts by the Museum of Modern Art. The live orchestra will be conducted by Gillian Anderson, who unearthed the film's original score. (Tickets \$12.50, \$10 for Michigan Theatre members).

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Declared D.W. Griffith's greatest work, a restored version of the silent film, "Intolerance," with an orchestral performance of the original film score, will be shown at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor Saturday, Nov. 2.



pass the popcorn

**LeAnne Rogers**

## Branagh does fine with Shakespeare

When the English needed a morale boost while World War II was raging, Laurence Olivier provided just the movie with his version of Shakespeare's "Henry V."

Here was a hero of epic proportions, a king who lead his outnumbered army to kick some French butt and gaining French provinces to which Henry had hereditary claims through his mother. No need to mention that Henry died 7 years later at age 35 and all the territory he won was lost. You take comfort where you can find it.

Actor-director Kenneth Branagh downscales the size and pagentry somewhat as he tackles "Henry V." That's not to say he doesn't want to create a larger-than-life character. Branagh, not a large man, makes a big first impression entering into the great hall back-lit and with his face shadowed.

The crown prince who had given his monarch father so much consternation, now has some nobles concerned about his ability to rule. But the lords and knights soon learn that it isn't the fun-loving Prince Hal on the throne.

And the nobles certainly had plenty of cause to be concerned about their new monarch. Just look at the company he kept.

BRANAGH, WHO adapted the play for the screen, and now video, does a nice job blending scenes of Henry, Falstaff, Mistress Quickly and the rest of the crown prince's gang into reminiscences and memories. For Falstaff and the others, Hal's a friend, but there is no love for King Henry.

Most of that group ends up badly one way or another. They never understand what the young king clearly grasps. However (and he is of his old friends, with their less than sober and honest ways, he has to distance himself if he is going to be a strong ruler.

Branagh does a good job showing Henry's sense of loss at putting away his youthful antics and taking on the heavy responsibility of a ruler. It's like a rite of passage to being king as he weeps at the battlefield hanging of an old friend for thievery.

Starting with the sound of horses' hooves in the fog and the whistling waves of arrows, the battle scene at Agincourt is stirring. Branagh, down in the mud and blood in the thick of battle, rallies his small army to move "once more into the breach."

The film is filled with terrific supporting performances by veteran British character actors such as Brian Blessed, Ian Holm, Alec McCowen and Robert Stephens. The wonderful Derek Jacobi opens the film with the prologue on an open stage — wearing a 40s-cut topcoat — and provides running commentary throughout.

PAUL SCOFIELD brings a weariness to the sad-eyed, dignified king of France, whose arrogant, thick-headed son pulls him into a war he senses will end badly for his country.

In his scenes attempting to woo a French princess to solidify his holdings on the continent, Branagh turns on the boyish charm and self-deprecating humor. He fast-talks the prin-

cess (played by real-life wife Emma Thompson), whose grasp of English is limited.

The movie is well-paced through Branagh's direction and adaptation of Shakespeare.

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