

Beatty's 'Bugsy' is an interesting but overrated film

"Bugsy" appeared at the top of several critics' 10-best lists and now has an excellent chance at the Oscars. Did I see the same film?

"Bugsy," still going strong on area screens, isn't exactly a disaster, but it's no masterpiece either. The story of Bugsy Siegel, a mobster whose vision of legalized gambling led to the modern-day institution known as Las Vegas, wears with me the same way Kevin Costner's "Dances with Wolves" did — mildly interesting but highly overrated.

Warren Beatty has long sought to bring "Bugsy" to the screen. In the script by James Toback, the gangster has an inflated ego and a sly touch with the ladies that almost surpasses Beatty's, whose off-screen affairs have always been far more exciting than his film projects.

The problem with Beatty is that he rarely lets himself look the least bit ugly, even when he's playing a killer. When he meets with notorious gangsters, he appears in a chef's hat or beneath a sunlamp.

Even when he takes a stool pigeon (played by Elliot Gould) for a ride, it's less cold-blooded murder as a


merciful killing of a la "Of Mice and Men." His occasional acts of out-and-out sadism, such as having a traitor bow down to him and bark like a dog, appear as an afterthought.

THE FILM catches up with Bugsy. In his prime as an established mobster and leads to some excellent early scenes. He walks into a man's office, offers him tailored shirts, and then guns him down without blinking.

He has a definite flair and his unpredictability keeps you guessing for the first hour. Unfortunately, there's still 1 1/2 hours to go.

Also handled well is the historical footnote that the starstruck Siegel, living in Hollywood, actually had a screen test made of himself. In real life, Bugsy hobnobbed with actors like George Raft (played here by Joe Mantegna).

There's plenty of possibility, too, in early moments with Annette Bening, who plays an actress and fellow mobster's girlfriend "who appears immune to Bugsy's surefire pick-up lines. But her vintage femme fatale bonter proves that she is definitely interested.



tickets please
John Monaghan

Their much-publicized love scenes have little spark or sexual energy as the film wears on, however, developing instead into jealousy and childish tantrums. Bening had much more in-

teresting (and sexy) parts when she was a nobody. Their relationship leads to the schmaltzy conclusion in possible, which completely mixes any of the

film's remaining integrity.

INSTEAD OF filming the project, Beatty has had "Bugsy" in a director almost as bland as himself. Barry Levinson, who knows the meaning of overrated with the success of his "Rain Man," doesn't take much advantage of the exquisite set design.

The only aspect of "Bugsy" that does live up to the hype is the score by Ennio Morricone, who has composed music for better and worse films than this one. He offers the

only notes of true intrigue.

A final thought: You've seen Beatty on the cover of virtually every entertainment magazine, touting "Bugsy" and his off-screen romance with co-star Bening. Does he really want to court the press or was he advised to roll over or risk a possible financial flop?

Whatever the case, something about "Bugsy" has caught the fickle affections of the critics. Perhaps Beatty is as surprised as anyone at the success.

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY, 5201 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-4048 for more information. (\$4 admission; \$25 series membership)

Double feature — "Flirtation Walk" (USA — 1934) and "Blossoms in the Dust" (USA — 1931), starting at 7 p.m. Jan. 10-11. In the first, West Point cadet Dick Powell falls in love with Ruby Keeler, an officer's daughter. "Mr. and Mrs. Is the Name?" highlights the musical numbers. "Blossoms," a vintage tear jerker, flirts Greer Garson starting an orphanage when she loses her own child.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2037 for information. (Free)

"Pack Up Your Troubles" (USA — 1932), 7 p.m. Jan. 8. In one of their better features, Laurel and Hardy are drafted during World War I. After the usual army hijinks, they begin the search for an army cat's daughter.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$3; 12 students and senior citizens)

"Eating" (USA — 1991) and "Camus' boots" (USA — 1991), starting at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 8-9. "Eating," the latest film from Henry Jaglom, explores the power-

ful role that food plays in a group of women's lives. Mary Crosby and Frances Bergen star. Preceded by "Camus' Boots," a short film by Farmington Hills-based Sundog Pictures, about a nerdy re-creator who meets up with the ghost of French existentialist Albert Camus. Shot entirely in Detroit and Ann Arbor.

"Star Trek Festival," 7 and 9:30 p.m. Jan. 10-11. This must for Trekkies features bloopers and outtakes from the original television series, a 10-minute mini-documentary about the making of the "Star Trek" movies, even an episode from the ambitious animated series. At intermission, there will be a trivia quiz with prizes.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$4; \$3.50 twilight)

"Madame Bovary" (France — 1991), French "New Wave" director Claude Chabrol tackles Gustave Flaubert's novel about Emma Bovary, whose longing for romance results in several lustful flings and luxury spending trips on borrowed money.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information. (\$5; \$4.25 students and senior citizens)

"The Rapture" (USA — 1991), through Jan. 12 (call for show times). Mimi Rogers plays Sheila, who divides her time between a dead-end day job as a telephone operator and wild nights as an uninhibited swinger with her boyfriend and the other couples they pick up. Eventually, she turns to religion.

"Jim Hefner on the Isle of Wight" (USA — 1991), Jan. 10-11 (call for show times). The guitar legend is captured in concert just 18 days before his untimely death. Here, on England's Isle of Wight, he delivers a superb set including an extended "Red House."

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Mary Crosby (from left), Lisa Blake, Richard and Marlene Glavin star in "Eating," the latest film from Henry Jaglom.

family, who fled the Nazis from their native Austria.

STATE WAYNE THEATRE, 35310 Michigan Ave., West, Wayne. Call 328-4600 for information. (\$2; \$1 children and senior citizens)

Double feature — "Daddy Long Legs" (USA — 1955) and "North By Northwest" (USA — 1959), Jan. 8-12 (call for show times). In the first, Fred Astaire is a playboy looking after an orphan girl who ends up falling in love with him. "North by Northwest" is the Hitchcock classic about a mild-mannered advertising executive (Cary Grant) who gets mistaken for someone else and involved in murder-inspired Bernard Herrmann score.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17360 Lahser Road, Detroit. Call 537-2550 for information. (\$2.50)

"The Sound of Music" (USA — 1965), 8 p.m. Jan. 10-11 (organ overture begins at 7:30 p.m.). Julie Andrews stars in the syrupy Rodgers and Hammerstein musical based on the life of the Von Trapp



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