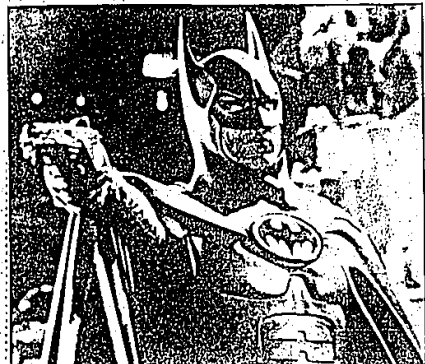


'Batman' returns, but Catwoman steals the show



TICKETS PLEASE



JOHN MONAGHAN

The controversy has ended. Whether or not Michael Keaton is qualified to play the Caped Crusader hardly matters. "Batman Returns," after all, belongs to Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman.

The feline femme fatale stalks her way across the screen in shiny black vinyl held together by roughly sewn stitches. She downs villains with a swipe of her cat claws, then chides the victims for foolishly waiting for a man, a Batman, to save them.

Catwoman aside, "Batman Returns" falls into the same deadly trap as the 1989 mega hit. Much like its portrayal of the comic book hero, the movie is impressively massive, stylized, and outfitted with expensive toys. It also spends

way too much time developing a plot that no one cares much about.

Christopher Walken, sporting the same vague European accent he used in "The Comfort of Strangers," does another villainous turn as Max Schreck, a wealthy industrialist who tries to convince Gotham City that they need more power. Actually, he plans to suck and store energy and eventually hold the city hostage.

Meanwhile, a mysterious penguin-man has been spotted in Gotham's sewers. When he finally surfaces, the Penguin (Danny DeVito) has his own scheme to get revenge on the parents who abandoned him as a child.

"I was son number one," he says, "but they treated me like number two."

Tim Burton returns as director on this second "Batman," but his style has become too recognizable. The blue-tinted cinematography and obvious use of miniatures that distinguished his previous pictures

grows almost precious here.

He has reached for something different with his set designers, who may still be the true stars of the movie. The first "Batman's" Gothic influence makes way for a touch of Germany between the wars, with variations on such New York City landmarks as Rockefeller Center and Central Park.

The German influence is felt elsewhere. Film buffs will recall that the villain's name, Max Schreck, is borrowed from the actor who played Dracula in the 1922 classic "Nosferatu."

The biggest problems with "Batman Returns" can be found in the

script by Daniel Waters ("Hudson Hawk"), which relies on the hackneyed premise that the Penguin runs for Mayor. Most scenes last less than a minute, yet the movie still gets bogged down in mundane detail.

Danny DeVito's Penguin, meanwhile, is too stuffed full of pillow talk to be all that menacing. He borrows The Joker's thick pancake makeup as well as his devil clown henchmen.

Catwoman is the real villain to contend with. Julie Newmar's Catwoman was ultra-sexy in the 1960s TV series, but her evil side turned to mush for her unrequited love with the ever-still Batman.

SCREEN SCENE

ANN ARBOR SILENT FILM SOCIETY

Ann Arbor Sheraton Inn, 3200 Boardwalk (across from Briarwood Mall), Ann Arbor. Call 761-8286 for information. (\$3).

"Buster Keaton Festival," 3 p.m. June 28. Several titles, some quite rare, from the work of the Great Stone Face. Among them, "Seven Chances" (1925), a feature in which Buster will inherit \$7 million, if only he can get married by 7 p.m. that evening; "One Run Elmer" (1935), in which he runs a gas station in the middle of the desert; and "The Playhouse" (1921), where he plays everything from a monkey to a complete orchestra to an entire line of dancers.

CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES

Lorch Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Call 764-6307 for more information. (Free).

"Demon Pond" (Japan — 1980), 7 p.m. June 26. In this fable, a mysterious pond houses more than just fish. The tranquility and natural beauty of the waters by day give way to bizarre and violent transformations at night. Continuing the

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY

16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2037 for information. (Free).

"Mysterious Mr. Wong" (USA — 1935), 7 p.m. June 22. The 13 sons of Confucious put San Francisco's Chinatown in a state of terror, until Mr. Wong comes along. Bela Lugosi stars.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W.

Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-0090 for information. \$5.50, \$9.75 twilight.

"Howard's End" (Britain — 1992). A romantic tale of two families and the inheritance of a beloved ancestral home. In the tradition of "A Room With a View," the production/director team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory turn to another E.M. Forster novel with completely winning results.

"Mediterranean" (Italy — 1991). An anti-war comedy about eight misfit Italian soldiers stranded on an idyllic Greek island near the end of World War II. Some clever moments distinguish this Oscar

REDFORD THEATRE

17360 Lahser, Detroit. Call 537-1133 for information. (\$2.50).

"Calamity Jane" (USA — 1953), 8 p.m. June 26-27 (organ overture begins at 7:30 p.m.). Doris Day plays the tomboyish title character who falls for Wild Bill Hickock (Howard Keel). The score includes the Oscar-winning "Secret Love."

STATE WAYNE THEATRE

35310 Michigan Ave., Wayne. Call 326-4600 for show times. (\$2-\$1).

"The Birds" (USA — 1963), June 24-29 (call for show times). Alfred Hitchcock takes a rare journey into pure horror as birds battle a sheltered New England coastal town. Tippi Hedren and Rod Taylor star.

"Albott and Costello Meet Frankenstein" (USA — 1948), June 24-29. The boys team up against all of the famous Universal movie monsters. Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney Jr. reprise their Dracula and werewolf roles while Glen Strange takes a turn at Frankenstein's monster. A rare chance to see this Sunday morning television staple on the big screen.

— John Monaghan

"Voyager" (USA — 1992), through June 27 (call for show times). Sam Shepard plays Walter Faber, an engineer traveling through post-war Europe where he must come to grips with his past lives and loves. Based on the novel "Homo Faber" by Max Frisch.

"1900" (Italy/France/Germany — 1977), 2:40 p.m. June 27 and 1:40 p.m. June 28. The uncensored and fully restored version of director Bernardo Bertolucci's sweeping epic which covers the history of Italy from the beginning of the century through the end of World War II. The all-star cast includes Robert De Niro, Gerard Depardieu, Burt Lancaster and Donald Sutherland.

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- Have fun!
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- Encyclopedias
- Records or cassette tapes
- A book about space
- A microfiche reader
- Adult mysteries
- Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
- Zillions (a children's magazine)
- This newspaper
- A card catalog
- A book about your state
- The children's section
- A copying machine
- A biography

(Note to adults: This is the second in a series of activities in the Family Reading Challenge 1992 Contest. Use this page with your child and share some educational summer fun.)

Yes! I have read at least:

3 newspaper articles and 3 books and discussed them with my parent(s) or guardian or another adult.

SIGNATURE OF YOUNG READER

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