

# Ryder and Davies face their realities

By JOHN MONTAGHAN

"Reality Bites," a new film aimed at the MTV audience, doesn't follow a script as much as run down a list of pop culture references. "Planet of the Apes," "Good Times," "Big Gulp" from 1975, "Eleven," Peter Frampton... These motivate the characters as they ponder life and love after college graduation.

While it ultimately has little to do with the real world it tries so hard to reflect, the movie is surprisingly engaging, thanks in part to a witty and talented cast.

Winona Ryder plays Lelaina, a communications graduate who now works on the set of "Good Morning Grant!" a geriatric morning talk show. On the side, she's making a video documentary comprised of candid interviews with her "twentysomething" friends.

Aside from life as a struggling artist, Lelaina also has boyfriend troubles. She meets and falls for a likeable square young TV executive named Michael (Ben Stiller) who thinks her video might work on his MTV-style station. She's also involved in a love-hate relationship with Troy (Ethan Hawke), a college dropout and

## MOVIES

genius who plays in the local grunge band.

Though entertaining, "Reality Bites" drives me in the same way that a recent "Time" magazine article did about Generation X, the media's label for post-"Baby Boomers." Its overgeneralized premise states that college graduates at The Gap, in fast food, at MTV or simply slacking.

Actor/director Ben Stiller tries to hit every base of modern culture here, especially in the embarrassingly "brilliant" video that Lelaina is compiling. We follow her best friend into an AIDS testing clinic, "a rite of passage for our generation," she comments cynically. We also have a token character "coming out" to his parents.

Stiller does infuse the movie with some clever moments, usually backed by an endless playlist of modern rock and vintage pop tunes so tacky that they're now hip. He follows a much-advertised gap in a gas station/food mart (My Sharona) with a nicely-framed shot of the tiny building beneath a starry night.

The rest of the charm here comes from the cast, especially Ryder as the soul-searching heroine. When you really think about it, her career has almost moved backwards. She started out with directors like Coppola, Burton, Jarmusch and Scorsese. Now she's making the kind of "brat pack" movie that her contemporaries moved on from long ago.

The childhood memories of British director Terence Davies comprise "The Long Day Closes," which questions the nature of reality when viewed some 40 years later.

This stunning film, bumped from last season's schedule to this weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre, finds 13-year-old Bud (Lelagh McCormack) plodding out an existence in post-war Liverpool not radically different from others of his generation. He helps his mother in the kitchen, gets thrashed across the hands at school, and lives for afternoons at the local movie palace.

What makes this boy's life so exceptional is that Davies picks up on every detail of a time and place long gone. As in his previous work (the black-and-white "Terence Davies Trilogy" and "Distant Voices, Still Lives"), the

director has an unblinking eye when it comes to beautifully composed shots.

There can't be more than 100 images in the entire movie, but each comes suitable for framing.

The most-publicized of these shots finds Bud with his chin resting on his hands in the first row of the elaborately decorated movie house balcony. The light of the projector shines warmly behind him. Another, shot from above, shows the boy looking out on the camera moves slowly over meticulously recreated rows of narrow houses.

Behind these images are smatterings of dialogue and music from vintage movies, everything from "Tammy and the Bachelor" to "The Magnificent Ambersons." As in the old musicals, characters in Davies' films often break into song, long-forgotten ditties from the past, which, like these settings, the director feels are his calling to preserve.

If you have a comment for John Montaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox 1868, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write to him care of Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

# Pornography causes crime: That's baloney

STREET SENSE



BARBARA SCHIFF

Voice mail message: Dear Barbara, Shame on you, you must know better. Why did you let the woman who quotes Ted Bundy, blaming the media and pornographic pictures for his sex crimes, get away with it? That's like blaming the weatherman for earthquakes and hurricanes. Of course, Ted Bundy would pawn off responsibility on someone else or something else for what he alone did. Criminals in general, and sexual offenders especially, almost never blame themselves for their behavior. That doesn't mean we have to accept their sleazy scapegoating.

In the letter I just read, the woman who wrote it quotes Ted Bundy saying, "We (does he mean killers and sex offenders) are your sons and we are your husbands. And we grew up in regular families. And pornography can reach out and snatch a kid out of any house today."

I say baloney. Ted Bundy is not my son or my father, or anything like either one of them. The woman who wrote you implies that pornography could turn anyone into a beast like this serial killer. Ted Bundy would have liked to believe that lie but that doesn't mean anyone sane should believe it.

I do not believe in pornography for children. I also do not believe it has the enormous power to corrupt as your writer expressed. An adult's responsibility for his or her behavior can't be relinquished.

Dear caller, I will say the same thing to you as I did to the woman who wrote the letter that offended

you. Thank you for taking the time and trouble to express your opinion, which is also expressed succinctly. You, too, vent the feelings of many others along with yourself. They will appreciate the validation of seeing this opinion in print.

— Barbara

Voice mail message:

Barbara, I'm commenting on the letter from the mother whose 12-year-old son wants a subscription to "Playboy" magazine. In handling that situation with our son, we decided that a subscription would not be appropriate. We did, however, purchase an individual magazine that he was able to look at and we also let him know that if he wanted to purchase another occasional magazine, we would not object.

I would agree with you that a "steady diet" each month is excessive and should not be allowed. But, for us at least, one magazine satisfied his curiosity and took the mystery out of the magazine.

After about six months, our son asked for another magazine, and again we allowed it. I don't know if this is the right thing, but it has worked for us.

Dear Caller,

Congratulations on your individuality, creative thinking and good taste in finding a solution to your son wanting a subscription to "Playboy."

Your son is lucky to have parents who are so sensible. Common sense is not so common.

— Barbara

If you have a question or a comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Sense, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. You can also leave a message by calling (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1877, on a touch-tone phone.

## SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Montaghan.

**DETROIT FILM THEATRE**  
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-2233 for information. (\$5)

"The Long Day Closes" (Britain — 1993), 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 25-26; 4 and 7 p.m. Feb. 27.  
"Terence Davies" ("Distant Voices, Still Lives") directed this autobiographical account of his years growing up in post-World War II Liverpool. The camera lingers longingly on detailed, emotionally charged images.

**KINOTEK**  
Capitol Theatre and Arts Centre, 121 University, Windsor. Call (519) 971-5160 for information. (\$4.50)

"El Topo" (Mexico — 1971) and "The Holy Mountain" (USA/Mexico — 1973), Feb. 25-27 (call for show times). Two rare cult films by director Alejandro Jo-

dorowaky. The first follows the title character, El Topo, through a series of surreal adventures across the Mexican desert. "The Holy Mountain" offers much of the same: repulsive images surrounding a paper-thin plot. Not for the squeamish.

**MAGIC BAG THEATRE**  
22918 Woodward, Farmdale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$4)  
"Dazed and Confused" (USA — 1993), 8 p.m. Feb. 23. It's the last day of school in 1976 as teenagers ponder the bigger issues in life, such as who will drive to get the Aerosmith tickets. Richard "Slacker" Linklater directed this subversive and entertaining comedy.

"Man with the Movie Camera" (USSR — 1928), 8 p.m. Feb. 24. The avant-garde musicians of DROP return, this time with Diga Vertov's experimental Russian film where the camera careers around with a mind of its own. The musicians have also created their own video and slide show to

present before the picture.

"We Think the World of You" (Britain — 1988), 1, 3:30, 6 and 8:30 p.m. Feb. 27. Alan Bates and Gary Oldman star in this oddball comedy about unrequited love. Shown with "Look," a short take on lesbian love and humor. Presented by South East Michigan Pride. (\$8 this film only)

**MAIN ART THEATRE**

118 N. Main St. at 11 Mile, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday. Call 542-0180 for information and show times. (\$6.50; \$4 students; \$3 twilight/mattinee)

"Schindler's List" (USA — 1993). Stephen Spielberg may finally get his Academy Award for this story of Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), a war profiteer and Nazi cronie who saved the lives of more than 1,000 Jews during the Holocaust.

"Six Degrees of Separation" (USA — 1994). Based on John Guare's award-winning play, a savvy young man (Will Smith) poses as Sidney Poitier's son to

cajole his way into the home of a Fifth Avenue couple (Donald Sutherland and Stockard Channing).

"The War Room" (USA — 1993). A behind-the-scenes look at the 1992 Clinton campaign focuses not on the candidate but on his team of election advisors, led by the charismatic James Carville and George Stephanopoulos. Veteran documentary filmmakers D.A. Pennebaker ("Don't Look Back") and Chris Hegedus directed.

**MAPLE THEATRE**  
4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield. Call 855-9090 for information. (\$5.75; \$3.95 matinee; \$2.95 twilight)

"The Snapper" (England/Ireland — 1993). When 20-year-old Sharon announces to her working-class parents that she's pregnant, her family and neighborhood react in some most surprising ways.

## In concert from page 4B

**ALAN JACKSON**  
The Ark, 6375 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. 313-761-1451

**CAELINE BLUES**  
With HAL at 3-D, 1815 N. Main St., Royal Oak. 810-569-3344

**TYRONE & POWERWHEEL**  
Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. (rock) 810-334-1999

**ARTURO SANDOVAL AND PONCHO SANCHEZ**  
Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. (jazz) 313-962-3610

**Friday, Feb. 25**  
**CHRYSLER FAIR**  
With Brotherhood of Dopes at Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. (alternative dance/funk) 810-334-1999

**SPANK**  
Featuring members of Red C and Missionary Slow at Lir's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. 313-875-6555

**DUKE ROBILLARD**  
Sully's, 4756 Greenfield Road, Dearborn. (blues) 313-846-1920

**VIDU HIPPIES**  
Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. (alternative rock) 810-334-9292

**ORIO ARATE**  
Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. (jazz) 313-662-8310

**CHAIN REACTION**  
Hessberg, 215 N. Main St., Ann Arbor. (rock) 313-663-7758

**BOB DAVE AND THE ULTRA SOUNDS**  
Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. 313-996-8555

**BURS BEDDOW BLUES BRIGADE**  
Cornell's, Troy. (blues) 810-569-3471

**ALAN JACKSON**  
With Pam Tills at The Palace of Auburn Hills, 175 and Lapeer Road, Auburn Hills. (country) 810-373-8200

**MARY MOORE & JULIE KOVICH**  
Hospo's, 4705 Lapeer Road, Auburn Hills. (acoustic) 810-373-4744

**ONLY A MOTHER**  
Lelaina with Woody and Tom Carr & Ex at Alvin's, 5755 Cass, Detroit. (weird) 313-832-0589

**DUKE ROBILLARD**  
Sully's, 4756 Greenfield Road, Dearborn. (blues) 313-846-1920

**SWEET**  
The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville. (rock) 810-778-6404

**Saturday, Feb. 26**  
**THE PRETTY GREENS**  
With Higher at The Impound, 17320 Harper Ave., Detroit. (alternative rock) 313-

**DOLLHOUSE**  
Lir's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. 313-875-6555

**DUKE ROBILLARD**  
Sully's, 4756 Greenfield Road, Dearborn. (blues) 313-846-1920

**DOO**  
With Failure at State Theatre, 2115 Woodward, Detroit. Sold out. (rock) 313-961-5451

**GARDEN OF EDEN**  
With Johnny and the Doomers at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. (alternative rock) 810-334-9292

**GEORGE HEDGARD AND THE HUMPHRIES**  
Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. 313-996-8555

**BURS BEDDOW BLUES BRIGADE**  
Cornell's, Troy. (blues) 810-569-3471

**MARY MOORE**  
Brendon's Pub, 33210 W. 14 Mile Road, West Bloomfield. (acoustic folk/rock/blues) 313-373-4744

**THE LUDITES**  
With The Hope Orchestra at Alvin's, 5755 Cass, Detroit. (rock/folk) 313-832-0589

**JEAN LIZARD**  
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. 313-961-MELL

**DUKE ROBILLARD**  
Sully's, 4756 Greenfield Road, Dearborn. (blues) 313-846-1920

**MR. BIG**  
With Slam Circus at The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville. (rock) 313-778-6404

**Sunday, Feb. 27**  
**BURS BEDDOW BLUES BRIGADE**  
Max & Erma's, 31205 Orchard Lake, Farmington Hills. 810-632-0990

**ROBERT JONES**  
U.U. Coffeehouse, 25301 Halsted, Farmington Hills. (blues) 810-632-0990

**THE SPINNAKES**  
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. 313-961-MELL

BY LEANNE ROGERS

STAFF WRITER

Even before his 1977 death, Elvis Presley had transcended being a rock 'n' roll singer. He was a beloved personality, an icon, the King. It seems only fitting then that a fictional film about Elvis should be a fable about the King's impact on a single mother and her two children.

Sounds like a good idea but unfortunately the film "Heartbreak Hotel" doesn't really succeed despite some nice moments. Set in 1972, the film opens with a still avelte, heavily sideburned Elvis laboring on stage under the weight of his trademark goofy looking white jumpsuit and his ponderously orchestrated Las Vegas rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Meanwhile, in a small Ohio town, young woman-musician Johnny Wells is frustrated by oppressive administrators who keep his band out of the high school talent show. Things aren't any

VIDEO

better on the homefront. Johnny and his younger sister live with their hapless mother, a bleached blonde Elvis fan who drinks too much and dates losers.

Although filled with scorn at the Las Vegas attraction Elvis has evolved into, Johnny figures that nothing will cheer his mom up better than a visit from the King. Naturally, he and his pals from the band decide the best way to get Elvis to drop in is to kidnap him.

Playing Elvis, David Keith doesn't really look like the singer. That's sort of a double-edged sword. On one level, it's rather disconcerting since Elvis' look and speech are so familiar. Yet, it also works since Keith is portraying Elvis as a real person, not doing an impersonation. He captures the energy of Elvis in a musical number set in a diner al-

though his beat scenes are on a more personal level.

Since writer-director Chris Columbus calls his film a fable rich from the outset, I guess you have to give him some slack on some of the sappier moments in "Heartbreak Hotel."

Elvis is everything to everyone. He helps Johnny, played by Charlie Schlatter, with his band and to success with his dream girl. His mom, played rather sleepily by Tuesday Weld, immediately cleans up her appearance and act once Elvis arrives.

The King has a magical impact on the everyday folks who love the real Elvis but can't save himself from the colonel and his toadying hangers on. Trapped by his own fame, Elvis himself is a regular guy who can't go out for a cheeseburger anymore.

"Heartbreak Hotel" is available on tape at local video stores. If you have a question or comment, call LeAnne Rogers at 953-2103.

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