

'Crooklyn' shows a kinder, gentler Spike Lee

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
Special Writer

Spike Lee, who proved himself more than capable of bringing the explosive Malcolm X to the screen, kicks back with a comparatively simple bit of nostalgia called "Crooklyn." After a decade of in-your-face filmmaking, this kinder, gentler Spike is a welcome sight indeed.

The Carmichael family is a close but struggling family living in Brooklyn in the early 1970s. Mom teaches school while dad tries to get people to listen to "his" music. The five kids — four boys and one girl — spend most of their free time in front of the TV set, playing games in front of the stoop, and fighting with each other.

The action centers on 10-year-

old daughter Troy, who tries to make sense of her eccentric family and neighborhood. It all looks fairly sane compared to the suburbs, where she spends part of the summer with her religious aunt and uncle in the South. The sounds of chirping crickets, unheard in the city, keep her awake.

Lee, along with siblings Joie and Cinque, made the screenplay loosely on their own family. Dad Bill Lee really was an idealistic jazz artist in the '70s. The kids, who pile in front of the television, know every word of the Partridge Family songs and stuff their faces full of Lemonheads and Bazooka bubble gum.

Spike, who obviously has fond memories of his childhood in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of

Brooklyn, calls it "a time when young African-American children were motivated primarily by two things: television and sugar."

Die-hard Lee fans might find this pretty tame stuff from the controversial director of "Do the Right Thing," which makes the non-threatening almost controversial. The project was originally conceived for television, but it's no way a commercial sellout. A movie as low-key as "Crooklyn" won't be an easy sell.

Key to the film are strong performances by Alfre Woodard ("Passion Fish") and Delroy Lindo (West Indian Archie in "Malcolm X"), who play parents with different styles of disciplining the kids. While she insists that they stay away from TV on a school night and clean up the kitchen af-

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ter dinner, he's more likely to let them run wild.

Perhaps most miraculous is the performance by Zeldia Harris as Troy. It's her performance of pre-adolescent naivete that really carries the film.

Despite its strengths, "Crooklyn" is far from perfect. At one point, Spike seems keen on testing the patience of his audience with a crazy camera lens that dis-

torts the action like a fun house mirror. Everything looks long and thin. The effect, used in all the scenes when Troy is down South, is appropriately outpacing and claustrophobic but also pretty tedious.

You also won't find Spike cutting any slack with his white characters, who are either seen as extremely neurotic (the geek next door who keeps 25 smelly dogs in

his apartment) or cold and authoritarian, like police and utility workers who exist only to harass the family.

No complaints with the soundtrack, which mixes an original jazz score by Terence Blanchard with popular music of the time. Among the gems: Smokey Robinson's "Tears of a Clown," The Staple Singers' "I'll Take You There," and the Stylistics' "People Make the World Go Round," which backs the tone-setting opening montage.

Fortunately, "Crooklyn" is more than simple nostalgia. A message (in some ways Lee's clearest) comes across about the power of family to stick together during difficult times.

SCREEN SCENE

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

DETROIT FILM THEATRE
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5)

"Sunday's Children" (Sweden - 1993). 7:30 p.m. May 20-21, 4, 7 p.m. May 22. Ingrid Bergman stopped directing almost a decade ago, but he penned this autobiographical account of his early childhood. His own son Daniel, in his debut feature, now sits in the director's chair.

"Mandala" (Africa - 1968). 2 p.m. May 22. The deceptively simple story finds a man receiving a money order only to go through a barrage of bureaucracy trying to cash it. Kicking off an ambitious weeklong tribute to Africa's most celebrated director, Ousmane

Sembene, who will discuss this and his other films after the screening. (\$10 admission this film only)

MAGIC BAG THEATRE
22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$4)

"The Hudsucker Proxy" (USA - 1994). 8 p.m. May 18-19. Tim Robbins' "The Player" plays Norville Barnes, a young Indiana business college graduate who goes from mail room to president's chair at a major corporation. Joel and Ethan Coen ("Raising Arizona," "Barton Fink") direct from a script co-written by former Detroiters Sam Raimi.

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/matinee)

"Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould" (Canada - 1993). Stratford actor Colin Fere creates a believable Gould, the real-life concert pianist. The short vignettes by director Franco Girard present him as eccentric, inspired, and thoroughly unpredictable.

"Back Beat" (Britain - 1994). Stu Beattie lives to be just a bit of a Beatle: he's the fifth band member who decided to leave the group before they became famous. He gets his due in this new film about the early, early years of the band, highlighted by a rocking soundtrack.

"Four Weddings and a Funeral" (Britain - 1994). From Mike Newell, the director of "Enchanted April," an engaging story about a confirmed bachelor who runs

across the same woman at the numerous weddings he attends. Hugh Grant and Andie MacDowell star.

MAPLE THEATRE
4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield Township. Films play through at least Thursday. Call 855-9090 for information. (\$5.75; \$3.95 matinee; \$2.95 twilight)

"Belle Spouse" (Spain - 1992). In this year's Oscar winner for best foreign film, a young army deserter tests the limits of his friend's liberal philosophy by pursuing each of the old man's beautiful daughters.

"Sirens" (Britain - 1994). John Duigan ("Flirting") directs this story of a young Englishwoman's sexual awakening when she visits the eccentric and bohemian household of a controversial painter. Sam Neill, Tara Fitzgerald and Hugh Grant star.

"Four Weddings and a Funeral." See Main Art Theatre listing above.

MICHIGAN THEATRE
603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information. (\$5; \$4 students/seniors)

"The Scent of Green Papaya" (Vietnam - 1993). Through May 26 (call for show times). A young girl in pre-war Vietnam finds surprising tranquility as a servant for a wealthy family.

"Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould" (Canada - 1993). Through May 29 (see Main Art Theatre listing above.)

"The Grapes of Wrath" (USA - 1940). 7 p.m. May 18. John Steinbeck's American classic about Depression-era families who head to California in search of a better life. Henry Fonda stars; John Ford directs.

"Dazed and Confused" (USA -

1993). 11:30 p.m. May 20-21. It's the last day of high school in 1976, as teenagers in a small Texas town ponder the bigger issues of life, namely sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Richard Linklater ("Slacker") directed this cult classic, an "American Graffiti" for the 1970s, featuring music by Foghat, Aerosmith, and Alice Cooper.

STATE THEATRE
2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 961-5450. (\$1)

"True Romance" (USA - 1993). 9 p.m. May 16. After killing a Detroit pimp, Christian Slater flees both cops and robbers in this violent action thriller scripted by Quentin Tarantino ("Reservoir Dogs"). Some scenes, including bits with Dennis Hopper as Slater's security guard father, were filmed in the Motor City.

STREET BEATS

"Jazz in the Present Tense"
— The Solsonics



With "Jazz in the Present Tense," The Solsonics do just that — bring jazz into the realm of the global community. They take jazz as a base and add in a whole lot of soul with some Latin and reggae influences to create a sound which can only be categorized as an incredible journey through the musical soul of the universe. Each song has a unique feel, but The Solsonics never lose sight of the groove.

Rising out of the Los Angeles club scene two years ago, bassist Jez Collin and percussionist Willie McNeil took their loves of different types of music and respective instruments and began playing their groove-heavy jazz in clubs throughout the Los Angeles

area. "Jazz in the Present Tense," their Chrysalis debut, reflects their musical back grounds as well as those of the rest of the musicians in the band.

Most of the album was recorded live during in-studio jam sessions, resulting in songs with the energy of club music and the intensity of good jazz. The tracks show both a diversity of backgrounds and a wealth of talent.

"Jazz in the Present Tense" could appeal to everyone on a different level. Whether it is for the soulful grooves or the Latin and reggae influences, update your soul with The Solsonics.

The Solsonics will also open for Queen Latifah at the State Theatre, 2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit, on Friday, May 27. Call (313) 961-5451 or (810) 645-6666 for more information.

— Eric Darling

Dreaming from page 8A

perience" which blends old and new with a glimpse of the musical future.

Like its other national and international musical counterparts, "Dreaming" artists offer voice and music sampling in interwoven with heavy bass and computer-activated drums. Nevertheless, each track also offers a spice of musical orchestration and imagination which other more commercially noted artists lack.

Tranquility Bass kicks off the release with the soothing

"Centamilla" which eventually flows into the breezy sounds of Hawk's "3 Nudes (Having Sex on Acid)." The release progresses into the heavy technical sounds of "Young American Primitive" by The Reality of Nature and clear glossy beats of the "Theme from Daisy Glow" by Daisy Glow.

"Dreaming" provides a view of musical life beyond glitter balls and colored lights. This is the music you would expect from a state which sleeps with its eyes open.

— Kyle Green

In Concert from page 8A

CHISEL BROS. WITH THORNTON DAVIS
Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. (Jazz) (810) 334-7401

BAR PHILLIPS
Magestic, 4140 Woodward Ave., Detroit. (Jazz) (313) 963-7680

GOALS
WVH Fall From Grace and Watership Down at The Ritz, 17500 Frisco, Roseville. (Rock) (616) 778-6404

SUBVERSIVE EARTH
WVH The Wayne Gaud Project at Magestic, 4140 Woodward Ave., Detroit. (World beat/Jazz) (810) 334-7401

THE BUILDERS
The Builders, 811 Monroe, Grosse Pointe Park. (Alternative glam rock) (313) 964-4404

WALK ON WATER
Club X at the State Theatre, 2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. (Alternative rock) (313) 961-5451

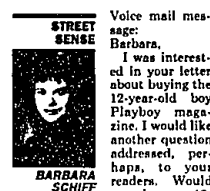
Sunday, May 22
890/LINO
Max & Erma's, 31205 Orchard Lake Road, at 14 Mile Road, Farmington Hills. (Jazz) (810) 885-0990

BRITAN ABARS
The Palace of Auburn Hills, 1-75 and Lapeer Road, Auburn Hills. (Rock) (810) 377-8200

IT'S PROGRESS
The Arts, 6375 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. (Funk) (313) 763-8587

GRANDSLAKE MURDER
Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. (Rock) (313) 334-7401

'Playgirl' not bad for young girls



Barbara Schiff
Voice mail message: Barbara, I was interested in your letter about buying the 12-year-old boy Playboy magazine. I would like another question addressed, perhaps, to your readers. Would you buy a 12-year-old daughter a "Playgirl" type magazine, where the men are nude? I wonder, how would the parents feel about that?

Dear Callor,
I want to respond to your ques-

Arrive early for Streisand

Officials at The Palace of Auburn Hills are urging ticket holders for this week's Barbara Streisand shows to arrive early because there will be no seating during the performances. The doors will open at 6 p.m. with Streisand's shows beginning promptly at 8 p.m.

Streisand debuted her show to

■ Teenage boys have a different problem than teenage girls. Boys have the fear of being rejected if they ask for sex. Girls do not have this problem.

tion. I hope, as you suggest, others will, too.

Teenage boys have a different problem than teenage girls. They have the fear of being rejected, if they ask for sex. Girls do not have this problem. If they want sex, they are rarely refused. So, for boys, reading about sex, and perhaps stimulating themselves while looking at pornography, is safe in comparison to the response they might get from the girls.

There might be many other

threads to this intricate problem, perhaps the hormonal shifts that take place during these years make the boys more preoccupied with sex as one means of continuation of the species.

Another way to explain the gender difference in sexual behavior are the evolutionary theories very popular with psychologists right now. For example, in animals, such as horses, the male leader has to face challenges from other male horses who want to

take over the female brood. Should the leader lose the battle, then the new ruler will kick the belly of the pregnant females until they abort their fetuses. The new leader then impregnates the females, and we have nature's way of upgrading the species through survival of the fittest.

For these reasons, and others, pornography for it is not the problem that it is for boys.

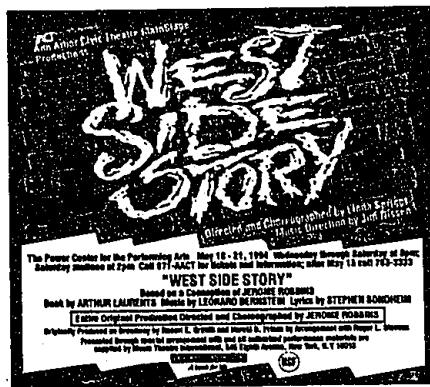
Barbara

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 953-2047, mail box 1877, on a touch-tone phone.



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