

MOVIES

'Pocahontas' teaches a tuneful history lesson



JOHN MONAGHAN

Critics have, for the most part, been overwhelmed. Scholars have sniped at the liberties it has taken with history. Nevertheless, "Pocahontas" delivers everything we've come to expect from a modern Disney classic — classy animation, a family-oriented story, and music that rivals the best of Broadway.

Try fining anyone who can hum a few bars from the Tony Award-winning "Sunset Boulevard." Yet who hasn't heard "Just Around the Riverbend," the best of Alan Menken's catchy "Pocahontas" score?

Pocahontas, the favored daughter of the powerful tribal leader Powhatan, is intelligent, intuitive, and fascinated by the arrival of an English sailing ship in 1607. Captain John Smith, who has dispatched his share of Indians

on previous voyages, changes his mind about these "savages" after meeting the beautiful Indian princess. Their meeting, and especially her historic plea to stay his execution, becomes a catalyst for peace between their peoples.

The animation, directed by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, is fairly straightforward, recalling Disney's human-heavy "The Sword in the Stone." Disney has long been criticized for creating stiff human characters, and with some in "Pocahontas" (especially male Native Americans) this may be true.

There are some showy flourishes, including quick cuts in the "Virginia Company" number and multi-colored leaves and starbursts, which swirl around the fated lovers whenever their eyes or lips meet. Computer animation is used most obviously in the creation of a wise old willow who advises Pocahontas to follow her heart.

Aside from Linda Hunt's turn as the tree, Mel Gibson's is the only familiar voice at work in

"Pocahontas." His blend of boldness and sensitivity are perfect even if the animated Smith comes off more blonde-haired surfer dude than 17th century English explorer.

To their credit, the folks at Disney have used Native American actors to supply the voices of Pocahontas and her father, respectively Irene Bedard and Russell Means. Bedard also served as a model for the Indian maiden's animation, though many have criticized the final product for looking too much like a bronze skinned Barbie.

Despite these protests, Pocahontas is a fine role model for girls, as vivid and headstrong as Belle and Ariel in other recent Disney films.

Unlike the animals in other Disney features, the raccoon and hummingbird who follow Pocahontas on her exploits do not have the power of speech. This forces the animators to devise clever bits that successfully recall the physical comedy of silent films.



The main foil of the forest-wise raccoon is the prissy pug owned by the English expedition's greedy leader. Their friendship underscores the message of the film, a reverberating "can't we all just get along?"

This message appears heartfelt, if largely misleading. The film would like us to believe that the

Disney feature: Pocahontas introduces her new friend, John Smith, to Grandmother Willow, a 400-year-old mystical tree spirit in Disney Pictures' new animated feature, "Pocahontas."

English followed Smith's lead, recognized the nobility of Native Americans, and let them live in peace.

Given the complexity of the story, and its intended audience, "Pocahontas" is an entertaining and valuable history lesson. It may be one of the few Disney features that will appeal to adults

SCREEN SCENE

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

MAGIC BAG THEATRE
22918 Woodward, Ferndale, Call

(810) 544-3030 for information. (\$4, \$3 students/seniors)

"Pulp Fiction" (USA - 1995). 9 p.m. July 4. The theater has turned Quentin Tarantino's supercharged comedy thriller into a

"Rocky Horror" of sorts, with intermission twist contest and T-shirt and poster giveaways. You can count on one hand the audience members who haven't seen the movie already.

MAIN ART THEATRE
118 N. Main Street at 11 Mile, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday, unless noted otherwise. Call (810) 542-0180 for information and showtimes. (\$6.50; \$4 students and matinee; \$3 twilight)

"The Bridges of Madison County" (USA - 1995). Skeptic greeted Clint Eastwood when he decided to bring Robert James Waller's much-loved, equally maligned novel to the screen, but it's not bad at all. Meryl Streep plays the Iowa farm wife whose chance encounter with a worldly photographer (Eastwood) changes her life forever. "The Underneath" (USA -

1995). This new psychological thriller reunites "sex, lies, and videotape" director Stephen Soderbergh and actor Peter Gallagher. When a man returns to his home in Austin, Texas, he realizes that things have changed and he doesn't know who to trust.

"Wigstock: The Movie" (USA - 1995). RuPaul, Lypsinka, Crystal Waters and Dee-Lite are among the luminaries who celebrated the

10th anniversary of Wigstock last year. The multi-media event, a glamorous drag version of Woodstock held in New York City, is chronicled in this acclaimed new documentary.

"The Postman" (Il Postino) (Italy - 1995). The relationship between an exiled Chilean poet and the uneducated man hired as his personal postman. Stars Friday.

FROM THE BEST-SELLING NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF JURASSIC PARK

"YOU ARE IN FOR A TREAT!"

PG-13

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AMC SOUTHWILD CITY	AMC WONDERLAND	AMC CANTON
QUO VADIS	RENAISSANCE 4	SHOWCASE 6
SHOWCASE 12	SHOWCASE 12	STAR GRANT AT 13 MILE
STAR LINCOLN PARK	STAR TAYLOR	STAR WINCHESTER 9
UNITED ARTISTS FAIRLANE	UNITED ARTISTS LAKESIDE	UNITED ARTISTS OAKLAND
UNITED ARTISTS 12 OAKS	UNITED ARTISTS WEST RIVER	FORD WYOMING

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THE POWER IS ON! JUNE 30

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS THE MOVIE

STARTS FRIDAY

AMC AMERICAN WEST	AMC BEL AIR
AMC EASTLAND	AMC LAUREL PARK
AMC SOUTHWILD	AMC WONDERLAND
QUO VADIS	RENAISSANCE
SHOWCASE 12	STAR GRANT
STAR LINCOLN PARK	STAR WINCHESTER
UNITED ARTISTS LAKESIDE	UNITED ARTISTS 12 OAKS
UNITED ARTISTS WEST RIVER	FORD WYOMING

Share love letter memories to win 'Postman' tickets

Have you ever received a letter that stole your heart? Briefly describe a memorable love letter, you wrote or received, to win prizes in our reader write-in celebrating "The Postman (Il Postino)" opening Friday, June 30, at the Main Art Theatre in Royal Oak.

Briefly describe the love letter. Tell us who it was from, and what made it memorable.

The first 10 readers to respond will receive a prize package consisting of a movie soundtrack cassette tape, book, and two tickets to the movie. You must be 18 or older to enter. There's still time, we've only received a few entries.

Send or fax entries by Friday, June 30 to: Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. To fax entries: call

(313) 591-7279. Call (313) 953-2105 for more information.

"The Postman (Il Postino)" is a funny and moving story about a postman whose eyes are opened to a world of new possibilities when

he finds himself delivering letters to one of the most romantic poets of the 20th century.

"The Postman (Il Postino)," a Miramax Films release, is rated PG.

THE THRILL RIDE OF THE SUMMER!

STALLONE JUDGE DREDD

STARTS FRIDAY JUNE 30

AMC ABILEE 8	AMC AMERICAN WEST	AMC BEL AIR 10
AMC EASTLAND	AMC LAUREL PARK	AMC SOUTHWILD CITY
AMC STERLING CTR. 10	AMC WONDERLAND	QUO VADIS
SHOWCASE 12	SHOWCASE 12	SHOWCASE 12
STAR LINCOLN PARK	STAR TAYLOR	STAR WINCHESTER 9
UNITED ARTISTS LAKESIDE	UNITED ARTISTS 12 OAKS	UNITED ARTISTS WEST RIVER
UNITED ARTISTS WEST RIVER	FORD WYOMING	

"PURE DISNEY MAGIC!"

- Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

"DISNEY'S DONE IT AGAIN. IT'S DAZZLING & WILDLY ENTERTAINING. IT'S A FILM YOU HAVE TO SEE!"

- Joel Siegel, GOOD MORNING AMERICA

"A SUCCESS! GLORIOUSLY COLORFUL, A LANDMARK FEAT."

- Janet Maslin, THE NEW YORK TIMES

"TWO THUMBS UP!"

- SISKEL & ERETZ

Disney's POCAHONTAS

PG - PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED

NOW SHOWING

AMC BEL AIR 10	AMC EASTLAND	AMC LAUREL PARK
AMC SOUTHWILD CITY	AMC WONDERLAND	AMC CANTON
QUO VADIS	RENAISSANCE	SHOWCASE 6
SHOWCASE 12	STAR GRANT	STAR LINCOLN PARK
STAR LINCOLN PARK	STAR TAYLOR	STAR WINCHESTER 9
UNITED ARTISTS LAKESIDE	UNITED ARTISTS 12 OAKS	UNITED ARTISTS WEST RIVER
UNITED ARTISTS WEST RIVER	FORD WYOMING	