

MOVIES

Actor takes on many roles in 'Anniversary Party'

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
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Actor Alan Cumming called Monday, June 18, to chat about his new film, an introspective, intimate look at the life of a Hollywood couple on the edge. *The Anniversary Party*, which he co-wrote, directed, produced and starred in with actress Jennifer Jason Leigh.

The story centers on The Therrians, a couple whose life appears to be coming back together, even while they're filling apart the seams. On the morning of their sixth wedding anniversary and after a year-long separation, the couple has decided to work out their differences.

The film details the next 24 hours at a party in their honor. The film opens in metro area theaters this Friday, June 22.

Here's what the Tony award-winning actor had to say:

O&E: Tell me where the idea for *The Anniversary Party* came from.

Alan Cumming: "Jennifer had just done a dogma film in Africa and I was staying with her when she came back. She was talking all about how great it was to work with digital video. Although we'd known each other, we hadn't done anything together. We made up a little story. We got our friends. It blossomed from there."

O&E: How long did it take from the time you had the idea until the film was completed?

A.C.: "We started writing the treatment in October. About February we sold the treatment. Eventually, we wrote the script (when Fine Line Features said they were going to buy it). There were a couple of weeks of drafts and changes. We told people the story so many times, it got so embellished, we knew exactly what we wanted to happen in every scene."

O&E: How did you manage to balance writing the story, directing, producing and then finally starring in the film?

A.C.: "It was much easier than you'd think. We made up the

story together and really when it came time to direct it, we didn't delineate. What else? Oh the acting (he laughs). The acting was really easy. Of course, we knew the characters so well."

O&E: Tell me about your character, Joe Therrian, and the qualities you admired about him.

A.C.: "I like his openness. I like the fact that he's sort of this guy who believes 'anything's possible.' Some of the negative things people think are true. He's like a little puppy, always looking for something sparkly. I like the way he really believes he really loves her. He's very in-the-moment and kind of selfish. In a way, he's not very responsible."

O&E: What do you hope people will take away from seeing this film?

A.C.: "The lessons you learn in life. It's basically about relationships are hard. Whether you're 25 years old and just starting out, there are lots of things to juggle. It's just difficult to have a relationship with another person and have it last. Life is hard. Life is not like the movies."

O&E: Tell me about choosing the cast, which is made up of mostly friends.

A.C.: "It was so nice. There is a kind of closeness when you know the people you're working with...They were playing parts that were a version of themselves."

O&E: Did any one actor or actress surprise you during the making of the film?

A.C.: "Mina Badie. I didn't know her work. She was a friend of Jennifer's. It's quite daunting



Celebrated: Actors Alan Cumming and Jennifer Jason Leigh try their hand at writing and directing with *"The Anniversary Party,"* which hits metro area movie theaters this Friday, June 22.

to work with a lot of those actors. She took the part and was so clever in it and curious. She's really amazing."

O&E: Tell me about the glass house, where the film is set, and its comment on the fragility of life, of relationships.

A.C.: "It's about people living in glass houses and all that sort of stuff. Hollywood is sort of a facade, nice to look at, but underneath it's sort of crumbling. It's very fragile, that house. I kept thinking, where's the mess."

O&E: The film was shot in just 19 days. How did you feel about using digital video?

A.C.: "I quite liked it. The good thing about it, we could shoot

using two cameras, up to four cameras. The cameras are smaller, very cheap. Going for a take, it was very easy. One of the bad things is it doesn't look as nice (as film). There was a problem with the depth of field. I'm very ambivalent. I like it and I don't."

O&E: What are you working on now?

A.C.: "I'm just having a big break. I'm actually writing a book, a novel. I want to try and get that sorted out. And traveling."

The Anniversary Party showtimes are 1:45 p.m., 4:15 p.m., 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. beginning Friday at Landmark's Main Art Theatre in Royal Oak.

GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

National Amusements Showcase Cinemas	Star Theatres	United Artists Theatres	WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN (PG-13)	Cinemark Movie 16
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Southfield 1.8 2150 N. Oakridge Rd. Between University & Walton Blvd. 248-375-2600 Bargain Matinee Daily All Shows Under 6 p.m. Continuous Show Daily Late Show Wed. Thurs. & Sat. NP DENOTES NO PASS	Star Theatres The World's Best Theaters Bargain Matinee Daily 5:00 AM Shows Starting before 6:00 pm Now accepting Visa & MasterCard *NP Denotes No Pass Engagement	United Artists Theatres Bargain Matinee Daily All Shows Under 6 p.m. Continuous Show Daily Late Show Wed. Thurs. & Sat. NP DENOTES NO PASS	WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN (PG-13) PEARL HARBOR (PG-13) SNEAK (PG) A DUMBEST THING (PG-13) THE MUMMY RETURNS (PG-13) CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES	Cinemark Movie 16 The Best Seat in Town 26600 Dequindre Rd. Warren, MI 810-556-8297
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Talking animals steal the show in 'Doctor Dolittle 2'

By MICHAEL MURPHY
SPECIAL WRITER

Why is it so funny when animals talk? It's hard to say, but on TV shows, in commercials and at the movies they're talking more and more. And we're still laughing.

In *Doctor Dolittle 2*, which, like the 1998 film remake of *Doctor Dolittle* stars Eddie Murphy, the good veterinarian doesn't just talk to the animals, the animals talk back.

The film places Murphy at the head of an effort to save a forest full of animals and an endangered Pacific Western Bear named Ava and voiced by Lisa Kudrow from an evil developer. And whether the animal lines are delivered Henry Youngman, Sopranos or Budweiser Bear style, the cast of critters has a lot to say about its impending destruction.

A subplot in the film puts Murphy at odds with his teenage daughter for reasons of adolescence and at odds with his wife for reasons of inattention.

After all, Dolittle convinces his family to trade a trip to Europe for a stay in a rustic cabin in the woods after he gets the call of the wild from a motherly raccoon (Michael Rapaport).

John Dolittle's proposed remedy to fend off development of the forest is to find a Pacific Golden Bear in captivity and reintroduce it to the wild so it can mate

with Ava. He finds one named Archie in a circus. The only problem is that Archie sings *Born To Be Wild*, but the forest is not the kind of "wild" he's talking about.

At one point, bemoaning his intended love's lack of interest in a civilized bear, Archie raids the Dolittle's icebox and overdoes on Ben & Jerry's. At first cool to the idea of hipping himself to the ways of the wilderness, he eventually comes around, only to be stalled by the nasty doctors of the film's development villains.

Will the forest be saved? Naturally, you might say, when the wild animals call on their domesticated brethren to help forestall the destruction of their home.

Main plot

So the main plot reprises the "save the farm" story and the subplot is pretty thin, too. Never mind, director Steve Carr would tell you, it's the animal chatter that matters.

For the most part, and despite his manic facial expressions and vocal intonations, Murphy takes a comical back seat throughout the movie and lets the animals do their thing.

Some of those things will get laughs from 6-year-olds of all ages, and some will go right over the kids' heads, but that's the kind of mix the makers of *Doctor Dolittle 2* seem to be going for—something for all ages.

Other voices featured in *Dr.*



Return: Eddie Murphy reprises his role in this summer's animal chattering comedy, *Dr. Dolittle 2*.

Dolittle 2 include Norm Macdonald, Phil Proctor, Frankie Muniz, Mandy Moore, Jamie Kennedy, John Leguizamo, Isaac Hayes, Andy Dick, Bob Odenkirk, David Cross, Jack Fargas and Renee Taylor.

Michael Murphy is a Livonia resident and writes about movies and music for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Fall in love with 'Moulin Rouge'

By JAY M. GROSSMAN
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"The greatest thing you'll ever learn is to love and be loved in return."

The mysteries of romance resonate throughout *Moulin Rouge*, an electrifying movie that uses modern-era pop tunes to tell the story of two star-crossed lovers during the turn of the 19th century in Paris.

From Madonna to Nirvana, the movie juxtaposes a variety of hit songs and choreography styles to create one of the most unusual cinematic experiences in years. Imagine the Police song, *Roxanne*, played to a classic tango. It's here.

Director Baz Luhrmann welcomes you to the Moulin Rouge, a nightclub for the underworld where dark red lipstick and smoldering glances intoxicate

Moulin Rouge brings fireworks to the big screen.

revelers like a cheap carnival ride.

It's here we meet Satine, played by Nicole Kidman, the city's most famous courtesan who longs to be an actress in a real theater. Ambitious and glamorous, it seems nothing will stop Satine from reaching her dream—until she meets Christian, played by Ewan McGregor, a dashing young writer from America who lands in Paris to learn about love and freedom.

Through his words and enthusiasm, Christian manages to convince Satine that nothing is more important than love itself. Her career is quickly at stake when she's forced to choose

between the poor Christian and a powerful Duke, who wants to finance her theater dreams.

Both Kidman and McGregor provide wonderful song and dance performances. The chemistry between these two is terrific, similar to Meryl Streep and Robert Redford in *Out of Africa*.

Adding yet another tragic touch to this whimsical tale, we learn from the opening scene that Satine, the "Sparkling Diamond" of the Moulin Rouge, is dying from tuberculosis.

Moulin Rouge brings fireworks to the big screen. It's not a movie for everyone—some might find it a bit too gaudy without enough substance.

But if you're searching for some passion, some love and some romance, this movie is definitely for you.

I give it four cigars and a snifter of brandy.