



LOUISE SNIDER



One-time delivery boy turned prize fighter Harry Hamlin gets instructions from his friend, Red Buttons (right), and his manager, George C. Scott.

## Familiar themes return with charm in 'Movie, Movie'

Return to the days of yesteryear with "Movie, Movie" (PG), two back-to-back spoof parodies on the movies of the '30s. The double bill is a fluffy and delectable send-up on staples of that decade: The boxing movie and the musical.

For years, both kinds of movies were released with plots so familiar that audiences always could anticipate when to dig for more Jujubes and when to clutch an armrest.

Mining these conventions of Hollywood's past to produce present comedy is nothing new. But understanding the appeal of these outmoded forms and intelligently working with them is new.

Mel Brooks would have taken these themes and massacred them. Neil Simon would have played them sexy cute with a wink at the audience.

**THE SCRIPTWRITERS** of "Movie, Movie," Larry Gelbart and Sheldon Keller, have taken these hoary chestnuts of the cinema and made plum pudding of them. That is to say, they have crafted a witty script packed with mixed metaphors that instantly identify characters, emotions and situations.

Both films remind us of the appeal of a strong narrative, a quality we see less in contemporary films. In "Dynamite Hands," a black-and-white fight film, a young man (Harry Hamlin) from a poor family gives up his dream of becoming a lawyer to become a boxer and quickly earn \$20,000 to pay for his sister's eye operation.

George C. Scott is Gloves Malloy, the kid's honest and lovable manager. Red Buttons, his trainer, and Trish Van Devere, his sweet, respected girlfriend who works at the public library.

The kid falls in with bad company, a crooked fight promoter, Eli Wallach, and his moll, Ann Reinking. Reinking plays the sultry seducer Troubles Moran. It's trouble on every count when the kid is told to throw his championship match, or else.

The second film, "Baxter's Beauties of 1933," is a musical in color that features many of the same actors. George C. Scott now plays the dapper Broadway producer Spats Baxter who must contend with a cash shortage and a temperamental leading lady (Trish Van Devere).

**HELPING SPATS** make his show a success is Rebecca York as his long-lost daughter. She's the plucky kid who joins the chorus and takes over to save the show when the star breaks a leg. Another showsaver is Barry Bostwick, a lanky Donald O'Connor type. He's an awkward, eager bookkeeper who becomes a Broadway composer after auditioning a song for Spats and then writing the entire musical score overnight.

Michael Kidd choreographed "Baxter's Beauties," which boasts an elaborate finale typical of the verve, inventiveness and, yes, artificiality that distinguished the era of Hollywood musicals.

A woman sitting behind me who enjoyed the movie thoroughly, but didn't realize it was a spoof, remarked as she left the theater, "I didn't know they made movies like this anymore."

Chalk one up for "Movie, Movie." Good humor, snappy pace, astute direction (by Stanley Donen) and engaging performances by newcomers and old timers alike provide entertainment that is always in style.

## Glimpses

### NEW RELEASES

**AUTUMN SONATA** (PG). Acting fireworks from Ingrid Bergman as concert pianist estranged from Liv Ullmann, her less talented daughter, as they meet and pour out their feelings. Ingmar Bergman directed.

**BRASS TARGET** (PG). Accident that killed General Patton was no accident, according to suspense film with George Kennedy and Sophia Loren.

**CALIFORNIA SUITE** (PG). Neil Simon's comedy of four episodes about guests at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Slappy cast includes Jane Fonda and Walter Matthau.

**EVERY WHICH WAY BUT LOOSE** (PG). Country-western-style action comedy with Clint Eastwood, Sandra Locke and Clyde, the orangutan.

**FORCE 10 FROM NAVARONE** (PG). High-powered thriller with Edward Fox and the late Robert Shaw on a team whose target is a vital bridge.

**INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** (PG). Remake of chilling sci-fi thriller about alien invasion in the form of plant pods.

**KING OF THE GYPSIES** (R). Three generations of gypsy life in America are chronicled in film of best-selling novel. Sterling Hayden is the patriarch and Shelley Winters the queen.

**LORD OF THE RINGS** (PG). Hobbits and the creatures of Middle Earth are energetically recreated in Ralph Bakshi's animated version of J. R. Tolkien's classic fantasy.

**MOMENT BY MOMENT** (R). Contemporary love story of young man (John Travolta) and older woman (Lily Tomlin).

**MOVIE, MOVIE** (PG). Expert and entertaining spoof of past double-bill movies with George C. Scott in fight movie and Bubby Berkeley-type musical.

**OLIVER'S STORY** (PG). Spongy sequel to "Love Story" with Ryan O'Neal and some new playmates, Candice Bergen and Nicola Pagetti.

**SUPERMAN** (PG). Christopher Reeve plays Big S, Marlon Brando is father and Gene Hackman the villain in this humorous fantasy.

**WATERSHIP DOWN** (PG). Animated adventures of a group of rabbits who leave their doomed warren to seek a safe home. Multi-leveled story of interest to adults and children.

**THE WIZ** (G). Lavish but lumbering version of the Broadway musical presenting Diana Ross in an updated black "The Wizard of Oz."

### MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
- PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
- R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.

# Players need more high spirit

By HELEN ZUCKER

## Review

Nothing can kill a good script.

Despite the absence of the improbable spirit the play calls for, the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Blithe Spirit," directed by Terence Kilburn, is an evening of good entertainment. The lines, surprisingly fresh, remind us of how good Noel Coward was and still is.

The crew of actors seem capable of rising to the exuberant, astral plane—and in a few stray moments, the wires connect and we are dazzled. But on the whole, the pacing could use a fast overhaul; the too-deliberate timing creates a production that hovers in mid-air and rarely gets completely off the ground.

With the exception of Jeanne Arnold as the medium who seems to inhabit all planes at once, and Mary Benson's Edith, the maid (also a creature of both worlds), this production of a play that should rise from the very start like a perfect soufflé remains earthbound.

**MICHAEL ALLINSON** as Charles Condomine, the writer besieged by two wives, one live, one astral spirit, looks splendid in his green velvet jacket or whatever he turns up in. But the Rex Harrison urbanity, the high style, the utter confidence and sense of surprise necessary to the role are not quite there.

Allinson gets in a few good moments. When he comes down to breakfast the morning after Elvira has "re-entered," and asks Ruth, his live wife, "Anything interesting in the Times?" and Ruth snaps, "Don't be silly," Allinson starts slightly and then shrugs as if to say, "Why, yes, of course, how silly of me to ask."

This is how Coward meant this line to be played.

Allinson's finest moment is his appearance at the opening of the third act. He sits down—wearing mourning bands on both arms. This kind of under-

stated, bemused touch carried through-out would have turned Allinson into a believable English novelist, the kind of witty character who plays the foil for assorted lunatic actions in many of Coward's plays.

(Jokes on writers often turn up in Coward's work; he mocked his occupation with high glee and this kind of "in" joke is essential to getting the most out of Coward's world.)

**VALERIE FRENCH** brings an irritated haughtiness to the role of Ruth, the second wife threatened by the reappearance of the first. Ms. French, a very attractive, sexy woman, turns in an oddly asexual performance.

I had the feeling I was watching an executive whose plans for company growth had been threatened by an upstart with a patent on her invention, rather than an acid, jealous wife.

Ms. French gives us a Ruth who seems more afraid of smashed vases than of the loss of her husband's affection.

This play turns on the premise that jealous women, dead or alive, will stoop to anything. In what should have been the key scene, Ruth's awareness that Elvira is trying to kill Charles, Ms. French passes over this heart-stopping truth as if it were just another observation.

Ms. French loosens up toward the end, however. As a spirit who can't wait to get into the other world, she turns in a fine, world-weary performance. She seems to be chumming with her fellow spirit, Elvira, than she ever was with Charles.

**CHEERY GIANNINI** as the "charming, disgraceful" blithe spirit is alternately petulant and raffish. She has an arresting voice; it hovers between husky demands and high, childish whines.

But the low cunning, the foxy devilousness of a woman who would not hesitate to remove the brakes from a car is missing. Ms. Giannini's Elvira seems more put out than distressed when she discovers she has bumped off Ruth rather than Charles.

Ken Graham is fine as Dr. Bradman. His ease with "Britishisms," his kindly asides to his talkative wife, his professional quiet coming and going make him realistic as the established English country doctor.

It's a small, thankless role, but Graham does the most that can be done with it. His thoroughly British jaw is a plus.

**LOUISE MARTIN** is competent as the conventional, rather silly Mrs. Bradman. Though for the life of me, I couldn't figure out what she was doing in a mink cape while accompanying the doctor on house calls.

(Is mink a touch of bedside manner whilst the good doctor attends to broken arms and concussed heads?) We wonder at Dr. Bradman's patience with this wife of his. But as an echo of the larger story, the general incomprehensibility of woman, Ms. Martin is fine. Had she been sillier, she could have been grand.

I HAVE NOTHING but praise for Jeanne Arnold. The show is hers. As the medium who summons Elvira from the other world, as the author of books about "highly conversational flora and fauna," i.e. children's books, Ms. Arnold is superb. Her Beardsley, high-bonemian outfit, her biking tweeds, her marvelous voice, are all exactly right.

Ms. Arnold can sing, trill, warble, shriek, speak clearly, do anything she wants to do with her voice, and she gets a chance to do everything. She literally lights up the stage whenever she appears. It is worth going to this production just to see Ms. Arnold.

She understands the tone of the play, and she exudes enough exuberance and sheer joy to redeem the evening. Ms. Arnold, sniffling ecstasies, is a high.

Mary Benson as Edith, the springing maid who is able to see spirits, is seen too little. Her gawky imbecility is wonderful. The finale belongs to Ms. Benson. (Does anyone know what an English drawing room looks like anymore?)

Donald Beckman's set, though serviceable, looks like a cross between a German tavern and a 1940s American living room. (Does anyone know what an English drawing room looks like anymore?)

**THE DIMESTORE** paintings are unbelievable. If one must have landscapes on the wall, Corot reproductions are cheap, and surely more fitting. The French doors through which Elvira comes and goes are about the only accurate touch.

Lighting by Fred Fonner was good. The costumes, by Mary Lynn Bonnell, were interesting. (Though I wondered whether black might not have been more suitable than the ghastly whiteness exuded by spirits who are meant to be sexy?)

"Blithe Spirit" runs through Feb. 25. Meadow Brook Theatre is located on the campus of Oakland University near Rochester.

## Registration is under way

Registration is under way for day and evening nondegree courses to be offered at the Oakland University Division of Continuing Education beginning the week of Jan. 22 on campus in Rochester.

Courses to be taken primarily at home, via newspaper and television, also will be conducted. For course details and to register, call the Continuing Education office, 377-3120.

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