

# Theater changes pace nicely

By HELEN ZUCKER

## Review



### The Movies

# Kermit the Frog, Muppet friends should tickle you

You have to love a frog who won't cause warts. That's Kermit, star of "The Muppet Movie" (G). The whole gang — Kermit the Frog, Fozzie Bear, Miss Piggy — appear along with more than a dozen live performers who make cameo appearances. However, none of the latter outshines any of creator Jim Henson's colorful muppet characters. With their rare combination of innocence and sophistication, pratfalls and parody, they possess a universal appeal that transcends boundaries of age and nationality.

Low puns and slight gags proliferate, but they are peppered with doses of sly humor to tickle the funny bones of older muppet admirers. An early demonstration of this occurs when Dom DeLuise, a Hollywood agent lost while paddling around in a swamp, says to Kermit, "I've lost my sense of direction," and Kermit replies, "Have you tried Hare Krishna?"

THERE'S A BIT of everything in this film; it's practically an anthology for movie buffs who will detect references to a variety of both innovative and stock movie situations from "High Noon" to "Close Encounters."

There is even a lyrical episode in which the lovestruck couple, Kermit and Miss Piggy, are shown gambling aboard in a series of images that recalls every montage of frolicking young lovers we've seen since Tony Richardson directed such a sequence in "Tom Jones."

The story itself falls somewhat between the Beatles' shenanigans and the Crosby-Hope "road" pictures. Kermit is on his way to Hollywood to become a star. On route, he falls in love, acquires a number of companions and encounters one very dastardly enemy, Dr. Hopper (Charles Durning).

Hopper owns a chain of fast food restaurants specializing in frog legs. He wants Kermit for commercials, but the frog would rather croak. Well, actually, he'd rather get to Hollywood and sign a "standard rich and famous contract."

KERMIT NEEDS all the support of his muppet chums to evade Hopper and, for that matter, most of the other humans he meets. Among them are Mel Brooks as a mad Nazi scientist who says he always sleeps well at night when he knows he's "caused a little pain in the afternoon," and Steve Martin as a sneering waiter in Lederhosen.

Least the audience go on a laughing jag, there are some surprisingly turgid musical numbers by Paul Williams, who also appears briefly in the film, and Kenny Ascher. If the idea was to lull everyone to sleep, it works.

Aside from these literally show-stopping tunes, "The Muppet Movie" is, as one character said before the blast, "dynamic."

## Glimpses



Tom Berger is Butch Cassidy in "Butch and Sundance: The Early Years."

### NEW RELEASES

- ALIEN (R).** Hair-raising, sci-fi horror film about alien life form that terrorizes the crew of a space ship.
- BLOODLINE (R).** Relatives trying to bump off pharmaceutical heiress constitute a bitter pill in placebo version of Sydney Sheldon's best seller.
- BUTCH AND SUNDANCE: THE EARLY DAYS (PG).** "Pre-quel" to the successful hit. Tom Berger and William Katt are paired off as the rascally robbers in their salad days.
- THE DEER HUNTER (R).** An emotionally gripping and violent film about the lives of three friends from a small steel town as they are affected by the Vietnam war.
- ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ (PG).** Clint Eastwood and director Don Siegel team up again to create a tense, taut drama from the conventions of the prison-escape film.
- THE FIFTH MUSKETEER (PG).** Your average swashbuckling tale with heroes, villains and court intrigue. Beau Bridges deftly handles dual role as nasty king and his noble twin.
- HAIR (G).** The counter culture musical of the '60s, directed by Milos Forman, comes to the screen with amazing vitality and musical energy — if a decade late.
- THE IN-LAWS (PG).** Hilarious comedy with Peter Falk and Alan Arkin as near-relatives who not only plan a wedding but ripoff the U. S. Mint.
- THE LAST WARRIOR (R).** Bizarre, tension-filled mystery is stylishly filmed, but burdened with hopeless, convoluted plot.
- THE LAST WAVE (PG).** Offbeat mystery from Australia when lawyer (Richard Chamberlain) encounters the occult as he delves into aborigine culture.
- LOST AND FOUND (PG).** George Segal and Glenda Jackson are paired again in romantic comedy about a "fractured" couple who meet in the Swiss Alps and decide to yodel on through life together.
- LOVE AT FIRST BITE (PG).** Dracula goes disco dancing in a funny, contemporary version with George Hamilton.
- THE MAIN EVENT (PG).** Barbra Streisand is a perfume manufacturer who manages a relied boxer, Ryan O'Neal, in comedy about the fight game.
- MANHATTAN (R).** The inhabitants are somewhat frayed, but the Big Apple looks glorious in Woody Allen's witty peek at the pairings and partings among New York literati.

### 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.

Everything is new at Somerset Dinner Theater this summer. "Good Time Revue. A Musical Memory," is an original script by Robert Casemore, the singers are fresh and very lively, and the menu, created by a new chef at Alfred's, is varied and excellent. The buffet (all you can eat) includes eight kinds of salad, sweet and sour pork, tender barbecued chicken, an especially good beef brisket stuffed with mushrooms, pilaf, creamed corn, rolls, chessecaake and coffee.

Somerset is the home of Detroit's original dinner theater, and producer Jimmy Launce, a veteran of this growing phenomenon, is bold enough to take chances on new talent. Launce's leap from sure winners such as Neil Simon and Bill Manhoff is, in this case, a fortunate one.

"GOOD TIME REVUE" is at once a swift, pleasant reminder of what America was like at the turn of the century, and a vehicle for good voices. The show uses a loose Reader's Theater format. Minimal props, sharp, bright costumes slipped on and off over black leotards and extremely effective slides. The actor-singers involved don't need anything else. Their voices carry the material easily.

Fred Buchalter exudes intelligence plus a "nice guy" feeling whenever he steps onstage. He moves easily from narrator to singer. But character acting is Buchalter's forte.

He is especially good playing Fidel

along or sang outright whenever memorable golden oldies cropped up. Debra Lamb is sheer talent. Ms. Lamb is one of the best trained sopranos I have heard in years. Her acting abilities are right up there with her incredible voice. The best number in the revue — Ms. Lamb's Chaplin imitation — is magic. This girl deserves a revue of her own; she could carry an evening with no problem. Ms. Lamb's rendition of "After You've Gone" was stunning.

Spunky Penny Masouris has marvelous comic timing and the most expressive face in Michigan. Ms. Masouris sparks the show with her electric presence.

"WON'T YOU Come Home, Bill Bailey" sung by Ms. Masouris as she vamped her way through a Max West imitation, was one of the high notes of the evening. Ms. Masouris exudes enough energy to light up Madison Square Garden. Her dancing is as lively as her singing.

Benjamin G. Wheeler pulled off an incredible rendition of "Mammy." Wheeler didn't play a hammy Al Jolson; he managed to make the number a creation all his own — quite a feat.

Wheeler is a very gifted actor, singer and dancer. I had the feeling that Wheeler had the potential to do roles of great depth and breadth, and I hope the opportunity comes his way.

Wheeler has been performing since age 4, and his expertise and talent were evident in everything he did. He moves beautifully, and has the range to pull

off an Eddie Cantor routine in three seconds flat, then turn into a straight narrator, or a cheerful fellow belting out "After the Ball."

Much of the credit for this successful revue goes to Joseph A. Mathia, the piano player who was so accompanist to the entire cast. Mathia had one solo, and it was nice to hear that 1916 classic, "Jelly Roll Blues" played live.

MATHIA KEPT modestly in the background for the most part. If not for occasional funny slides such as "Please Feed the Piano Player," and "Don't Shoot the Piano Player," the audience would never have noticed the piano off-stage in a dark corner.

Jack G. Grukke's lighting was terrific. Grukke acted as assistant director as well. Robert Casemore directed his own revue and the show has a nice tightness, a feeling of cohesion.

Launce thought up the idea for the revue, and Kathryn L. Sutton, a gifted director who has served as Launce's co-producer on many other productions, has once again seen that everything is in working order. The details that make for professional theatre have been attended to.

Choreography by Nira Pullin was smart, and Brigitte Launce was a deft stage manager. Performances are Friday and Saturday evenings. Dinner begins at 7:30 p.m., the curtain goes up at 8:45 p.m. Somerset Dinner Theater is located on the lower level of Somerset mall in Troy.

## Mel Lewis plays P' Jazz bandstand

The superb basic "swing" beat jazz of Mel Lewis, and the varied pop and jazz melodies of Stanley Turrentine, will be featured at Chuck Muer's P'Jazz at the Hotel Ponchartrain Monday and Wednesday, July 9 and 11.

Stanley Turrentine's style now features sweet-sounding back-up voices, as well as the melotron, an instrument giving him an electronic violin sound. He is considered a crossover artist, one who has been able to successfully add upbeat jazz and conga rhythms to his sound.

He has captured an audience of newer jazz enthusiasts and was named the Jazz Man of the Year in Billboard Magazine in 1975. His record, "Pieces of Dreams," also captured top honors as the "Best Jazz Album" that year.

Advanced reserved seat tickets can be purchased through the P'Jazz ticket office, located on the 25th floor of the Hotel Ponchartrain (telephone 965-0200). Ticket office hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday. General admission tickets are sold at the door beginning at 5 p.m., prior to the concert.

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DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

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