



Isabelle Huppert and Kris Kristofferson portray Ella Watson and James Averill in Michael Cimino's "Heaven's Gate."

the movies
Louise Snider

Audiences unlikely to cause a jam-up at 'Heaven's Gate'

"Heaven's Gate" (R) has one thing in common with writer-director Michael Cimino's previous film, "The Deer Hunter." Both present incredibly rich and detailed portraits of some particular aspect of our culture.

In "The Deer Hunter" the portrait consisted of vivid scenes of a Russian-Orthodox wedding in a Pennsylvania steel town.

In "Heaven's Gate" the imagery is more historical than ethnic. The film begins with a surprising prologue that presents a Harvard graduation in 1870.

"Heaven's Gate" had a disastrous New York opening last November. Cimino has pared down the movie from about 3 hours and 40 minutes to about 2 hours and 20 minutes, but he couldn't make himself cut the Harvard graduation scenes. Little wonder, when you think about the time, expense and effort that went into their creation.

BUT THIS IMPRESSIVE prologue, with its (presumed) authenticity of costume and pageantry, has almost no relevance to the rest of the movie. The same is true of the epilogue.

Cimino's attention to detail, which captures the flavor of an era or a society, fails him here because it doesn't advance the story. It seems as if the director got so carried away with establishing the right mood, the right historical setting, the right look, that he forgot the purpose these elements serve.

The story is never clearly presented. The editing is terrible; the movie jumps about erratically. Character development is neglected. Relationships are obscure. Consequently, the talents of some fine actors, particularly John Hurt, who received an Academy-Award nomination for "Elephant Man," are wasted.

The historical episode which provides the linchpin of "Heaven's Gate" is the Johnson County, Wyo., range wars of the 1890s.

Eastern European immigrants were pouring into the West to establish themselves as settlers and farmers. The cattlemen resented the foreigners, who were reducing the area of open range. Furthermore, many of the immigrants, starving while waiting for the government to act on their land claims, were stealing cows for food.

THE STOCK GROWERS' Association decided to take the law into its own hands. It compiled a death list of 125 persons, virtually every male immigrant in the county, and hired an army of mercenaries to do the job.

Kris Kristofferson is the Federal marshal, sympathetic to the settlers. Hurt is a member of the Stock Growers' Association. The marshal and cattlemen were classmates at Harvard. Why they went to Wyoming, and how Kristofferson became a marshal are questions left unanswered.

Nor does the movie ever clarify the relationships among the characters. It is suggested that the marshal and Christopher Walken, a hired gun for the cattlemen, were once good friends; but we don't know how they came to be friends or why their friendship ended.

Walken, like Hurt, is a blank in this movie. His character's background, motivations, values, ambitions are never revealed. The same is true of Isabelle Huppert who plays the young French madam of a brothel. Kristofferson and Walken are both in love with Ms. Huppert. She seems to be in love with Kristofferson but she agrees to marry Walken.

"Heaven's Gate" doesn't provide explanations or answers, only a series of disjointed episodes that culminate in the anticipated shoot-out between the immigrants and the cattlemen.

It just reminds us that directing traffic at this "Heaven's Gate" is Michael Cimino, not Saint Peter.



Immigrants are crowded inside and atop a box car, headed for settlement in Wyoming's Johnson County.

what's at the movies

EXCALIBUR (R). Sweeping adventure of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, with Nicol Williamson as the wizard, Merlin.

GOING APE (PG). What to do when you are killed \$5 million under condition that you take care of three orangutans.

HARDLY WORKING (PG). Slapstick comedy with Jerry Lewis as middle-aged, unemployed circus clown creating havoc in a variety of jobs.

THE HOWLING (R). Oddball movie mixes horror and humor in werewolf story.

LA CAGE AUX FOLLES II (R). Albin and Renato get involved with spies in this sequel to "La Cage aux Folles." It's not as funny as the first, but it does offer some sharp commentary on sex roles and expectations.

MODERN ROMANCE (R). Unusual comedy about a quarreling couple. Albert Brooks is a worrying, suspicious lover who can't be happy whichever way the romance works out.

NIGHT HAWKS (R). Fast-action drama as a pair of special N.Y. cops (Sylvester Stallone and Billy Dee Williams) confront a vicious terrorist.

NINE TO FIVE (PG). Comedy with Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton as three secretaries who scheme to get rid of their boss.

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (R). Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange in sexually emphatic remake of James M. Cain's novel of lust and murder.

MOVIE AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

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Folk guitarist gives concert

Folk guitarist Marcia Taylor will appear in concert at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward at Lone Pine.

Ms. Taylor is a graduate in classical guitar from Michigan's Interlochen Arts Academy. She has developed an eclectic style ranging from folk to swing to blues. She uses her musical presentations to support women's issues, ecological awareness and international peace.

Tickets are available at the door for \$3 (\$2 students and seniors). There is a jam session after the concert; tickets are \$2 and musicians are being encouraged to bring their instruments.

The concert is co-sponsored by the National Organization for Women, Detroit Safe Energy Coalition and Upland Hills Ecological Awareness Center. Proceeds from the evening's events will support the three groups.

For further information or tickets call 531-8943.

Auditions open at Will-O-Way

Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre will hold auditions at 8 p.m. Wednesday and 2-6 p.m. Sunday for William Shakespeare's comedy classic "As You Like It."

Actors should bring their resumes to the readings at the theater, 775 W. Long Lake Road, between Telegraph and Lahser roads, Bloomfield Township.

Although four roles have been selected by Director Celia Merrill Turner, many choice parts for men and women remain, a Will-O-Way spokesperson said. Mime and Elizabethan music will enhance the production.

"As You Like It" will run Fridays-Saturdays from June 12-27. Call Will-O-Way at 644-4418 for more information.

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