

the movies

Dan Greenberg

Naples sets scene for bright comedy of reunited buddies

"Marcaroni" is a delightful dish of the very best pasta in town. The town is Naples and Marcello Mastroianni is charming in a tour-de-force performance well worth the price of several admissions. Jack Lemmon is no slouch either. The two of them brighten the screen with a number of electric moments.

Robert Traven (Lemmon) is a headcase-ridden, pill-popping, obviously distraught and distracted airline executive who arrives in Naples to inspect Acrolalia programs and facilities. While it is never quite clear what relationship his company has with the Italian airline, it doesn't matter. It is obvious that he is a Very Important Person.

Important or not, Traven is so compulsively obsessed with his corporate life that his personal life is a shambles and even his past is repressed. It turns out his past includes a trip to Naples 40 years earlier as part of the U.S. Army liberating Italy and a brief romance with Maria, sister of his then-good friend, Antonio Jasiello (Mastroianni).

Well, as any warm and hospitable Neapolitan will tell you, the visit of an old friend must go unnoted, particularly when he is an important, visiting American dignitary and the centerpiece of the Jasiello family fantasy for four decades.

DURING THAT TIME, via an incredible series of letters, Traven has kept in touch and related his exploits. Ever since still refers to him as Maria's fiancé, even though she has married and become a grandmother. There's just one catch. Traven never wrote a word. Jasiello, a writer of limited success, has created a "persona" of the indefatigable Roberto Traven, international correspondent and hero of countless exploits. As Jasiello's letters over Traven's signature reveal, single-handedly Traven has saved more women and children and averted more disasters than the entire International Red Cross.

All this, as you might well imagine, comes as something of a shock to Traven who first must struggle even to remember Jasiello, Maria and their past friendship. Traven isn't even polite when first approached by Jasiello.

All that changes under the spell of Jasiello's unbounded optimism. His belief in life's potential for good and for accomplishment overwhelms the realities of his rather unsuccessful life and the dreary, mundane existence of those around him.

"The Cult of Roberto," as it were, is the central and guiding image of Jasiello family existence. Traven's selfless devotion to truth and helping others inspires them all. It is unimportant that none of it is true.

JASIELLO'S courageous human spirit and unrelenting optimism shine through and, in the end, he will have you believe he can rise from the dead. Now that's optimism!

Mastroianni exudes warmth and humanity at every turn, always excusing the shortcomings of others, quick to praise and slow to condemn. The role is a natural for him, and he plays it to the hilt. Every moment with Mastroianni on screen is a pleasure and a delight. His voice, mannerisms and movements all project the cosmopolitan sophisticate who can and does cope with failure.

As a counterpoint, Lemmon's Traven is acerbic, compulsive and disquieting. While the qualities are stereotypical of the obsessed executive, Lemmon underplays it sufficiently well, with the raised eyebrow and the slight grimace. His role is realistic rather than clichéd. The transformation that Mastroianni's warmth causes in Lemmon's behavior is never overdone, always reserved, always credible.

To those two excellent performances, add a wide range of competent supporting roles, particularly the touching confusion of jealousy by Maria's husband. The marvelous Neapolitan setting and cinematography enhance those performances with only a heavy-handed musical track marring a fine picture.



New releases

Rock star Sting and his musical career is the subject of "Bring on the Night." The film tells about the formation of his new group since leaving the Police. (Below) Joseph Bologna (center) in Dr. Malavague, who has an armhold on servants played by John Dyrer and Carol Kane in the horror spoof "Transylvania 6-6000."



wine

Richard Watson

Another of those good news-sad news columns. The latter first. It is with regret that I report the early September death of Dr. Konstantin Frank of Vinifera Wine Cellars in Hammondsport, N.Y. The subject of a recent column here, he was truly the father of the vinifera wine grape in the eastern United States.

All evidence and history proved that it was impossible to grow chardonnay and riesling grapes in the face of the bitter winters of upstate New York until Frank, a refugee from Russia in the early 1950s, showed it could be done.

The American wine industry is the richer today because he ignored the obvious, went on his way with Charles Fournier and showed that it could be done.

His reputation: difficult and intractable. My experience: warmth and charm when I visited him as a friend and admirer some years ago. He was 86 when a stroke took him. History will not forget this man.

THE GOOD NEWS is that in recent weeks several new and inexpensive chardonnays have arrived on local wine shelves. All are priced under \$10, most less, and all are very decent. They are of recent vintage and lack the complexity that comes with extended wine aging.

What they gain by this is a fresh fruitfulness that demonstrates what a delightful grape this can be when it is treated thus. These wines lack the acidic crispness of chablis and the buttery richness of white burgundy. They boast charm rather than depth.

My personal favorite and, alas, the most expensive is John Sater's 1984 under his second label, Chase Creek. This one comes close to being a profound wine. It has complexity without being intimidating. I can be found for about \$9 a bottle and is worth much more. Most memorable.

Another fine release, also on a second label, is the 1983 Felts Springs. Made by the Mill Creek Winery in Sonoma, this is a fine value at \$5.99. It is very clean, well made and has a hint of citrus. It shows chardonnay oil to its best effect. Its quality and price more than offset its especially ugly label, a traditional Mill Creek problem.

Stratford produced an astounding 1982 chardonnay a year ago. Now the 1983 is available locally and, while less successful, it is still a sound wine.

There are hints of oak balanced with good fruit. More complex than the Chase Creek, it is one that some people will prefer. At \$8.99, this is a fine value for a special occasion.

FINALLY among the new arrivals is one on the Jonathan label. Its 1983, available in 1.5-liter bottles at about \$8, is direct and pleasant. The wine is from the same group that owns Domaine Alexander.

Mention must also be made of a 1983 chardonnay that has been around for many months but not noted in this column. That is from Chalk Hill (again a second label, this time from the Donna Maria Vineyards of Sonoma, an instance where the alter-

nate label has been more successful than its parent). Hints of wood and good acidity complement the essential grape flavors here. Well done at \$5.50 a bottle.

And there are two new cabernets that warrant mention. There is a 1982 from Felts Springs, full of mint and ripe olive flavors, also at \$5.99. And the 1983 from J. Lohr (Santa Clara) is perhaps the steal of the month. At \$3.99 it is a great buy.

There has been a non-vintage Lohr Cabernet around for some time at the same price, a bit vegetal but most acceptable. This new one is more typically Californian and should not be missed. The label is stunning and memorable. I don't like it but it will not be easily overlooked on wine shelves.

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