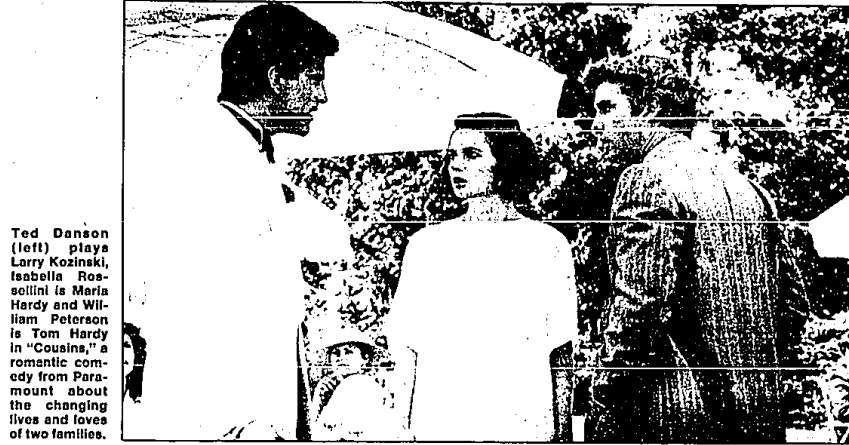


MOVING PICTURES



Ted Danson (left) plays Larry Kozinski, Isabella Rossellini is Maria Hardy and William Peterson is Tom Hardy in "Cousins," a romantic comedy from Paramount about the changing lives and loves of two families.

'Cousins': great entertainment

Several readers have written regarding my review of "Torch Song Trilogy." My apologies if anyone took offense, although none was intended. Careful review of that column in no way indicates any question about my support for everyone's political, legal, social and cultural rights — provided only that they do not harm others.

The current cycle of American remakes of French films provides another winner in "Cousins" (A-) (PG-13) 115 minutes. This son of the 1976 "Cousin Cousine" which won Best Foreign Film Oscar is sort of an out-doesy "Moonstruck" although "Cousins" doesn't have quite the ethnic family intensity, coherence and impact that "Moonstruck" did.

Larry Kozinski (Ted Danson) and his wife Tish (Sean Young) live with his teenage son, Mitch (Keith Coogan). Mitch's mother was Larry's first wife. At a family wedding, Larry meets — and becomes enamored of — a cousin, Maria Hardy (Isabella Rossellini), while her husband, Tom (William Peterson) is slipping off in the bushes with Larry's wife, Tish. These are only the main points of this happy, jumbled, multifaceted ethnic conglomerate, the Kozinskis and Costellos.

While there are characters everywhere, they are delightful, easy to keep track of and fun to watch. Characterizations are very well done ranging from Maria's mom, Edi Costello (Norma Aleandro), and Larry's father, Vince (Lloyd Bridges), to Aunt Sofia (Gloria DeAngelis) and a host of charming little children.

The photography by Raffi Bovei ("Distant Thunder" and "The Accused") is excellent and Angelo Badalamenti's musical score is superb. Despite his fine performance, however, Ted Danson never quite makes it as an ethnic. Aside from that, "Cousins" is great entertainment.

Grading the movies

- A+ Top marks - sure to please
- A Close behind - excellent
- A- Still in running for top honors
- B+ Pretty good stuff, not perfect
- B Good
- B- Good but notable deficiencies
- C+ Just a cut above average
- C Mediocre
- C- Not so hot and slipping fast
- D+ The very best of the poor stuff
- D Poor
- D- It doesn't get much worse
- F Truly awful
- Z Reserved for the colossal bad
- \* No advanced screening

"Tap" (C-) (PG-13) 105 minutes. On the other hand, is entertaining but not great. It's refreshing that Black film production finally has hit the mainstream with movies like "I'm Gonna Get You Sack" and "Tap." That doesn't mean, however, that "Tap" can sell all the old, 1934 white movie-musical clichés.

There are excellent dance sequences with Gregory Hines, Suzanne Douglas and Sammy Davis Jr. that make a trip to your local Bijou worthwhile but the story of Hines as an ex-con torn between tap dancing and crack-cracking is just too much. Savion Glover (turns in a most performance as Douglas's son and Hines' young admirer. Ms. Douglas is a dance teacher who maintains Hines' father's studio.

The dancing of Davis, Douglas and Hines — Glover does a neat turn as



the movies Dan Greenberg

well — come close to saving this film as do the tap routines of Sammy Davis Jr.'s cronies, a terrific bunch of crotchety old men who hang around the studio.

But all that fine shoe — tap, soft and otherwise — can't save a film with lines like, "Dancing is what I am." "I want to die with my tap shoes on." "They couldn't take away his pride," and a hero with electronic taps.

STILL PLAYING: "The Accidental Tourist" (C+) (PG) 120 minutes. Slow-paced family melodrama. "Beaches" (A+) (PG-13) 120 minutes. Bette Midler and Barbara Hershey in line show of friendship.

"Child's Play" (B-) (R). Horror story about possessed doll given as a birthday present. "Crossing Delancey" (A) (PG) 95 minutes. A liberated, young New York gal, but grandma has Old World ideas.

"Dangerous Liaisons" (C-) (R) 115 minutes. Even lush images and good acting can't overcome the non-cinematic quality of this boring story of pre-Revolutionary French decadence. "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" (B+) (PG) 100 minutes. Super-sleek con men on the Riviera are lots of fun.

"Her Alibi" (B-) (PG) 90 minutes. This murder-mystery-spy-detective-or-detective-writer story is well-done but too much. "I'm Gonna Get You Sack" (C+) (R) 85 minutes. Slow-paced satire of B-movies from the black point of view.

"Iron Triangle" (B) (R) 90 minutes. The brutality of the Vietnam war told from the Viet Cong point of view.

"The January Man" (B) (R) 95 minutes. Clichéd but slick detective story with big-name cast.

"Mississippi Burning" (A+) (R) 130 minutes. Brilliant political film about human greed, fear and cruelty. A must-see.

"My Stepmother Is an Alien" (B+) (PG-13) 108 minutes. When extra-terrestrial Kim Basinger touches down, this comedy takes off. "Naked Gun" (D) (PG-13) 90 minutes. Overly broad farce never gets off the ground floor of the police squad room.

"Oliver and Company" (A) (G) 70 minutes. Disney animation at its best.

"Rain Man" (A+) (R) 130 minutes. Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman star as brothers in every sense.

"Three Fugitives" (A-) (PG-13) 95 minutes. Touching comedy about a tough guy, a little misfit and his cute daughter.

SCREEN SCENE

AFTERNOON FILM THEATER, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (11:30 all seats) "Three Penny Opera" (1931), 1 p.m. Feb. 14-19. Grungy, weirdly solemn adaptation of the Brecht-Weill musical about love and power brokerage among the criminal classes. Directed by G.W. Pabst, with Lotte Lenja.

DETROIT FILM THEATER, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (15 all seats) "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 17-18 and 5, 7 and 9 p.m. Feb. 19. Trendy, tiresome farce by Spanish director Pedro Almodovar is sort of like "Desperately Seeking Susan" without Madonna, Roseanna Arquette or jokes.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY, 201 Dodge Hall, Rochester. Call 370-2020 for information. (11 all seats) "Going Back" (1984), 7 p.m. Feb. 18. Feature by Rochester-area director Ron Teachworth about two men yearning for youth was an award-winner at the Ann Arbor Film Festival.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 605 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 669-8397 for information. (\$4 regular, \$3.25 for students and seniors) "Festival of Animation" (1988), 9 p.m. Feb. 13, 8:45 p.m. Feb. 14, 7:15 p.m. Feb. 15, 7 p.m. Feb. 17 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 18. Animated shorts from all over the world. Features an adaptation of Detroit-based band Was (Not Was)'s charming jingle "Dad, I'm in Jail."

"Hollywood Shuffle" (1988), 7 p.m. Feb. 15. Robert Townsend wrote, directed and starred in this funny, thought-provoking take about the tribulations of a young African-American actor in Hollywood. "The Lost Weekend" (1945), 9:15 p.m.

VIDEO VIEWING

Videos open door to foreign 'world'

By Dan Greenberg special writer

Foreign films on videocassette offer to any viewer a world of images not readily available at the suburban mall or neighborhood four-waller.

Cruising the shelves at the local video shop turns up recent, as well as classic, older examples. Of course, the major problem with foreign films is translation into English. Neither subtitles nor dubbing is completely satisfying, but it beats the alternative — not seeing the tremendous range of films around the world.

Foreign films dubbed on cassette have an advantage that dubbing doesn't get in the theater. Because the screen is small the annoyance of lips flaring in one language, while someone is speaking another, is not so pronounced.

Subtitles, however, remain the most widely used translation technique, and no matter how well done they interrupt the film's visual continuity. Then, too, there are all kinds of subtitles, and it is hard to read while letters superimposed over a white tablecloth.

Two recent VCR releases alleviate the problem with yellow letters outlined faintly in black. They are easily read, but even if they weren't, these 1987 PG French films — "Jean de Florette" (122 minutes) and "Manon of the Spring" (113 minutes) — are so good that you ought to rush right out. Both get an A+ in this corner.

Based on Marcel Pagnol's two-part novel, "Water of the Hills" these lyric films should be seen in one sitting, if at all possible. They are a perfect double bill. Despite that unity, each film stands on its own and can be enjoyed separately.

SET NORTH of Marseilles in the '20s, Jean de Florette (Gerard Depardieu) is a postal clerk who, with his wife, Alcega Depardieu's real-life wife, Evelyne, a former opera singer, and their daughter, Manon (Emmanuelle Béart in part two) decide to return to the land.

The farm that they have inherited is coveted by Cesar Soubrayan

(Yves Montand) for his nephew Ugolin (Daniel Auteuil). Cesar is somewhat of the grand old man of the town, but has no heirs except this nephew who needs de Florette's farm and spring to raise cattle.

This tale of rustic greed and rural vengeance is so well told by director Claude Berri that it rises above any specific place and time and becomes a tale of human passion for all times and for all places. Greed, avarice, murder, deceit, passion, indifference, love, tenderness — they are all there, along with the stunning photography of Bruno Nuytten. It's performed by one of the best acting ensembles imaginable.

Yves Montand is irascible, greedy, cynical yet tender and loving. While all those emotions seem incompatible, Montand manages an effortless portrayal of this complex character. Soubrayan, He and Daniel Auteuil's weak-witted nephew are a fine pair — villains and tragic heroes at one and the same time.

In order to take over Jean de Florette's farm, Cesar and Ugolin block the spring that waters it. Gerard Depardieu, one of France's finest actors, poignantly communicates the strength of character and love of family of the idealistic, sensitive, hunchback postal clerk who returns to the land to farm scientifically.

THE FILM itself is so densely packed with rich images of southern France and a broad palette of nature as well as fine characters that it is difficult to describe the story briefly without disclosing key elements. The film is so well-done that it tells it itself.

The two actresses who play Manon are excellent. Béart who plays the mature Manon, was seen here recently as an angel who fell to earth and stirred local souls with her beauty. In the second film, through her strength of character as much as her beauty, she achieves some of her father's goals.

If you can't find four hours to watch these two tapes in one sitting, squeeze them into a weekend or something, but see them. Your life will be richer for the experience.

Latin American Solidarity Committee's free film series.

"Sleepwalk" (1987), 7, 9:30 and 10 p.m. Feb. 18, Angell Hall. Jim Jarmusch, claims his friend Sara Driver is a better director than he is. This haunting, astonishing film about the mystical experience of a Manhattan typewriter proves he's right.

"Down by Law" (1986), 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 18, Hill Street. Speaking of Jarmusch, this hackneyed, pretentious tale of low livers in Louisiana will bore the living cement out of you. With Tom Waits and John Laurie.

"Shattered Dreams: Picking Up the Pieces" (1987) 8 p.m. Feb. 18, MLB 3. Victor Schoenfeld's epic documentary chronicles the rise and search state and the forces that threaten to destroy it. "Horsefathers" (1932) 7:30 p.m. Feb. 18, with "A Night at the Opera" (1935) at 9 p.m. Arguably the two best films the Marx Brothers ever made, and anybody who wants to argue about it can step out the side.

"Singin' in the Rain" (1952) 7:30 p.m. Feb. 18, Nat. Sci., with "An American in Paris" (1951) at 9:30 p.m. Classic musicals belated by generations of Gene Kelly fans, and slavishly imitated by a million MTV videos.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN, Evergreen Road across from the Fairlane Towne Center, Dearborn. Call 593-5390. (Free)

"The Accused" (1988) 7:30 p.m. Feb. 15-16, Recreation and Organization Center. Powerful drama about a rape victim's quest for justice. With Jodie Foster and Kelly McGillis.

"Black Orpheus" (1960) 8 p.m. Feb. 17, Classroom and Administration Building, Room 138. Marcel Camus' lush poetic retelling of the Orpheus myth, set in Rio de Janeiro during Carnival.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

'Women': 'Pedro's Playhouse'

By Anne Sharp special writer

Spanish director Pedro Almodovar's "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" may be the most trendy date movie of the season. For heaven sake, don't wait for this one to show up at the Maple. Hurry down to the Detroit Film Theatre this weekend, and here's what you'll see:

First of all, the most tempting opening credit sequence of the year so far. Credits are superimposed on collages of campy, voluptuous images from glamor magazines of the '60s, accompanied by a lolling torch ballad from the same era.

Then, you'll enter a world that might be dubbed "Pedro's Playhouse." You'll shiver with delight at the movie's giggly postmodern look. It's all luscious fire engine reds, violets and cobalt blues. Plastic duckies, funny alarm clocks, earrings shaped like espresso pots, everything but the King of Cartoons!

You'll smile expectantly at the first appearance of the film's heroine, played by Almodovar's favorite leading lady, Carmen Maura. She's a haggard, doe-eyed beauty of a certain age with "comedienne" written all over her. A Latin Carol Burnett? Not really. As it turns out, Maura is more or less the straight man in this story.

The plot revolves around her finding out the man she loves has run off with another woman and that her pregnancy test is positive, all on the same day. Maura plays it sober-

faced, fainting and weeping at intervals to remind us this is not a funny situation.

Almodovar drags in all sorts of farcical plot complications, including Shiite terrorists, a pistol-brandishing madwoman and a plucker full of drugged gapacho that makes various characters pass out for convenient plot purposes.

This film has all the sophistication and wit of an "Our Gang" comedy. Even the subtitles don't disguise the fact that the story, set in Madrid, could just as easily take place in California, with Bette Midler and Shelly Long in the principle roles, with little difference.

The only really enjoyable thing about this movie is the way it looks. And that trendy look is already starting to curdle. The Pee-Wee decor is already a bit old hat, and the visual nods to New Wave and the post-punk appear rather stale in 1989.

That's all the more reason to rush out and see "Women on the Verge," while there's still an aura of hotness about it. Six months from now it will just seem tepid.

STAN BRINKHAGE has earned laurels as one of the greatest innovators of American avant-garde cinema. He revolutionized the film world's idea about what can be done with the medium, pioneering the use of the hand-held camera, for instance.

He also has done amazing things to the film itself — gluing movie

wings directly on to the celluloid, for example, as in "Mothlight" (1983), or spending six years painting images on to each individual frame as in his "Dante Quartet" (1987).

Here's your chance to meet the man in person. Brinkhage will appear, courtesy of the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor's program in film and video studies, at retrospective showings of his films Feb. 16-17. The programs will be held each night at 7:30 p.m. in Lorich Hall Auditorium (corner of Monroe and Tappan). Admission is free.

Brinkhage's early works, "Destiny," "Dog Star Man" and "Dante Quartet" will be featured Thursday and his recently completed "Faust" trilogy will have its premiere on Friday.

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