

MOVING PICTURES



Roseanne Barr, Ed Begley Jr. and Meryl Streep team up for Orion Pictures' latest release, "She-Devil."

DeVito is self-indulgent in his 'War of the Roses'

Success leads to self-indulgence and Danny DeVito's work as director and supporting lead in "War of the Roses" (R, R, 110 minutes) is a perfect example of that premise.

The Roses — Barbara (Kathleen Turner) and Oliver (Michael Douglas) — are a wealthy couple whose vicious divorce battle forms the central section of this unpleasant film about two obsessive (and obese), destructive characters. Their story is related by their friend, Gavin D'Amato (Danny DeVito), a divorce attorney and member of Oliver's prestigious law firm.

"The War of the Roses" exhibits self-indulgence at every turn. The trouble starts with the framing, pseudo-moralistic story in which Gavin lectures a prospective client using the Roses as an example of divorce and its destructive potential.

Throughout the film, this client sits in Gavin's office looking uncomfortable and embarrassed. That's the proper attitude for everyone associated with this production.

That amateurish structure is compounded by DeVito's sophomoric character as a \$450 an hour attorney and a fast man with the ladies, until the film's end when marriage overcomes him, why or to whom we never learn. There were several interesting possibilities but as it stands unresolved — it's frustrating and distracting in a film that sets itself up as a definitive statement about marriage and divorce.

BARBARA FRYING onions after she's locked Oliver in the steam bath and her cat fighting with the dog also exemplify this simple-minded intelligence which infuses "War of the Roses." Turner and Douglas as college kids is hard to believe and their falling in bed in a simple-minded love-at-first-sight routine doesn't wash well either.

That incredible opening leads to the greatest complaint, the film's lack of development. Suddenly, these two college kids — who strangely enough have no family or friends other than Oliver's law firm folks — are off and running in marriage with kids and Oliver's successful law career.

Then, quickly, the over-used justification for divorce — "he's too busy with work and she wants more than housewifery." Well, that hardly justifies the bitter divorce battle culminating in an unpleasant and demented conclusion.

While bizarre conclusions do arise from minor stimuli, a motion picture



the movies Dan Greenberg

is obligated to make it all seem reasonable. "War of the Roses" falls miserably in that regard and, despite nice photography and good acting, is an annoying, malicious and distasteful film. However, given the pervasive nature of contemporary society, the film probably will do well at the box office.

Meryl Streep has done it again even though she doesn't have the title role in "She-Devil" (B+, PG-13, 98 minutes). That honor goes to Roseanne Barr, who, as Ruth Patchett, proves the old adage about a woman scorned.

HER HUSBAND, Bob (Ed Begley Jr.), does the dirty deed by deserting her and their children, Nichollette (Elizabeth Peters) and Andy (Bryan Larkin), to take up with Mary Fisher (Meryl Streep), noted author of 32 passionate, romantic best sellers.

Mary Fisher lives the books she writes in a glorious mansion by the sea. Streep's characterization (and satire) of the romantic novel writer/heroine is delightful, particularly when it turns out that she has no unsavory past and a pretty raunchy mother (Sylvia Miles).

Mary Fisher couldn't be as perfect as she pretends and those character flaws explain why she takes up with Bob who is a classic philanderer with a very unpleasant family.

There is a tendency, however, to bring on characters only when needed to advance the plot, particularly Nurse Hooper (Linda Hunt), and discard them as if they weren't organically related to the story.

Hunt is missed, since she and Barry play particularly well together, making a fine statement about individuals who don't measure up to media standards for beauty and accomplishment.

STILL PLAYING:
"All Dogs Go To Heaven" (B+) (G) 90 minutes.

Well-known voices back this animated story about Charlie the German Shepherd and his doghouse.

"Back to the Future Part II" (B+) (PG) 90 minutes.

All your favorite time-travelers are in other dimensions once again.

"The Bear" (B) (PG) 93 minutes.

Excellent nature photography but film often lacks continuity and gets pretty sloppy at times.

"Black Rain" (D) (R) 120 minutes.

Unpleasant, trite detective story stars Michael Douglas.

"Crimes and Misdemeanors" (A+) (PG-13) 100 minutes.

Woody Allen at his best in this romantic comedy about family life with all its joy and sadness.

Fryer, Red Fox, Arsenal Hall and Della Reese — can't save this slow-paced 1930s Harlem gangster story.

"The Little Mermaid" (A) (G) 80 minutes.

Disney animation of Hans Christian Andersen tale of mermaid in love with human.

"Look Who's Talking" (C+) (PG-13) 97 minutes.

Contrived, poorly structured story of pregnant CPA (Kirstie Alley) and her search for a perfect father for her baby.

"National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" (B-) (PG-13) 90 minutes.

Christmas vacation for the Griswold family is okay for National Lampoon's fans.

"Parent Hood" (A-) (R) 120 minutes.

Large, talented cast in complex but entertaining story about a family that includes Jason Robards, Steve Martin, Tom Hulse, Martha Plimpton and Diane West, among others.

Delightful story of nine-year-old girl who finds an injured reindeer just before Christmas.

"Sea of Love" (C) (R) 110 minutes.

At Paris as a burnt-out detective does a very weak script.

"Sex, Lies, and Videotape" (R).

Everyone's talking about this romantic comedy with James Spader.

"Shocker" (R) 107 minutes.

Wes Craven does it again, this time in the world of electronic video mayhem.

"Staying Together" (A) (R) 95 minutes.

Warm, sensitive tale of three sons on their own when dad sells the family business.

"Steel Magnolias" (B+) (PG) 110 minutes.

Talented cast led by Shirley MacLaine's performance tells short in depicting problems of six Southern women.

"Tender Mercies" (A) (R) 100 minutes.

Deliciously understated story of a man who finds himself in a small town in the South.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

Film remembers Monk

By John Monaghan
special writer

Categories always elude Thelonious Monk. As a musician and a man, he was at least as hard to define as be-bop, the form of modern jazz which he helped originate.

Ironically, a new documentary, "Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser," has no real creative aspirations. Directed by Charlotte Zwerin, this is a no-frills look at the influential jazz pianist and composer, with narration on his early life, interviews with people who knew him and archival footage.

Recent jazz documentaries like "Dizzy Gillespie in Cuba" and "Let's Get Lost" were made on minuscule budget and released mostly at small store houses. "Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser" has major names behind it.

Clint Eastwood, who proved himself a major jazz fan by directing "Blues" in 1987, fronted much of the money for the project. Distributed by Warner Brothers, the film opens for what will likely be a short run at the Maple Theatre in Birmingham.

In an early clip, Monk's road manager flips through a copy of "Who's Who" and reads the entry on Thelonious Monk. Characteristically, the musician seems uninterested. "Yeah, I'm famous; isn't that a bitch," he slurs in a raspy, usually indistinguishable growl.

FAME, FORTUNE and verbal self-expression never mattered much to Monk. The music did, however, and the film picks up when it shows Monk at the piano, in various TV clips and footage from a 1967



Thelonious Monk

documentary, which makes up a least half of the film's 90 minutes.

The contemporary interviews are sparse, comprised more of road managers and business associates than musicians. They tell of their constant concern for Monk, includ-

ing how he would react when drawn for a "Time" magazine cover.

Though never fully discussed in the film, Monk suffered from emotional problems, complicated by drugs (he died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1982). He looks constantly dazed, as if someone just hit him over the head. Fellow musicians and managers are patient with him, as if he were a brilliant, crippled child.

Monk arrives in London with an all-star octet. He's skeptical that his sparse compositions will work with such a large group. Just hours before the performance, only Monk knows what music they will play.

During the concert, Monk stands up and walks over to a trumpet player mid-performance and the tune just kind of trails off. The audience applauds tentatively, then enthusiastically. This kind of unorthodox behavior became almost unexpected in a Monk concert.

PIANISTS BARRY Harris and Tommy Flanagan also show up their memories of Monk told to the piano. They play dual piano versions of Monk compositions like "Well, You Needn't" and the haunting "Misterioso."

A reporter asks Monk if he would like the piano to have more keys than the standard 88. "It's hard enough work with those 88," he replies. It's the only question he answers that comes out halfway straight.

Actually, as far as shedding light on what's going on inside his head, Monk is of little help. As far as he's concerned, the music is everything; and the film reflects this aesthetic.

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM THEATRE. Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave. Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (\$3)

"Cria." (Spain — 1977). 7 and 9:30 p.m. Dec. 15, 9:30 p.m. Dec. 16. A re-release of a unique and dream-like family portrait about a child confronting the adult world. With Geraldine Chaplin.

"High and Low" (Japan — 1963). 5 p.m. Dec. 17. Kurosawa's breathtaking wide-screen thriller takes an Ed McBain crime novel and sets it in modern day Japan. Toshiro Mifune stars as a rich industrialist who goes to amazing lengths after his son is kidnapped.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY. 1601 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)

"Way Out West" (USA — 1937). 7 p.m. Dec. 11. Laurel and Hardy's best feature film, with the boys entrusted to deliver a mine deed to a late prospector's daughter.

LIVONIA MALL CINEMA. 29415 Seven Mile, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (Free)

"Ima La Douce" (USA — 1963). 10 a.m. Dec. 12. Billy Wilder directed this popular comedy about a

naive gendarme (Jack Lemmon) in love with a prostitute (Shirley MacLaine). Continuing a month-long tribute to Lemmon-Wilder films.

MICHIGAN THEATRE. 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information. (\$4 regular, \$3.25 students and senior citizens)

"Fat City" (USA — 1972). 7 p.m. Dec. 12-13. John Huston directed this realistic tale of a small-time boxer (Steve Keach) and his young protegee (Jeff Bridges). Perhaps Huston's most underrated feature.

"Split" (USA — 1989). Dec. 12-15 (call for show times). The struggle between good and evil played out with a sense of humor in an avant-garde sci-fi film. A film festival hit by first-time director Chris Shaw.

When Harry Met Sally" (USA — 1989). 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Dec. 14 and 9:15 p.m. Dec. 15. Rob Reiner directed this Woody Allen-style romantic comedy about the conflict between man and woman trying to remain just friends. Winning performance by Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal.

"The Wizard of Oz" (USA — 1939). Dec. 16-23 (call for show times). The classic fantasy film returns in a sparkling new color print.

"Festival of Animation." Dec. 16-23 (call for show times). Seventeen

new titles from Canadian animators

"Wuthering Heights" (USA — 1939). 7:30 p.m. Dec. 17. Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon play the lovers of Emily Bronte's great Gothic romance.

REDFORD THEATRE. 17360 Lasher, Detroit. Call 537-2560 for information. (\$2)

"David Copperfield" (USA — 1935). 8 p.m. Dec. 15-16. Freddie Bartholomew plays the title character of Dickens' classic novel. With Lewis Stone, Arthur Treacher and W.C. Fields. Directed by George Cukor.

TELE-ARTS. 1540 Woodward, Detroit. 563-8650. (\$3.50, students-seniors \$2.50)

Davis-Bogart — "The Petrified Forest" (USA — 1936) and "Marked Woman" (USA — 1937). Dec. 13-17 (call for show times). Continuing a tribute to classic films. In the first, Bogie plays killer Duke Mantee, holding hostages in an Arizona diner. Davis is the wide-eyed waitress who longs to visit France. Leslie Howard the drifter-intellectual. "Marked Woman," meanwhile, stars Bogart as a crusading D.A. trying to get call-girl Davis to testify against her gangster boss.

— John Monaghan

VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

The video cassette market continues to boom and, since almost anything sells, almost everything is produced. The seemingly insatiable video market generates capital for some pretty strange stuff.

You'll probably think I made this up as a joke to prove my point but I didn't. Next month's release schedule includes "Perseus: The Female Freedom Fighters" and "Raid Grannies." Those two are Troma releases and some of you may know what that means. It's a certain kind of joke that some enjoy.

What is unfathomable, however, is why a producer takes the trouble to gather a fairly talented cast in a production of more than modest proportions and give them a jumbled script devoid of any basic excitement. To compound the sin, they bill it as a "suspenseful crime thriller."

Whatever the reason, HBO Video has done just that in "The Heist" (1989, color, 97 minutes). When it hits the racks at your favorite video store next week, move on down the aisle unless insomnia is your problem. There's no suspense here and no thrills, only the crime of producing "The Heist" in the first place.

AFTER FOUR years in prison Neil Skinner (Pierce Brosnan) "Remington Steele" returns seeking vengeance against his ex-partner, Ebel Berens (Tom Skerritt) — "Steel Magnolias," "Top Gun." Berens framed Skinner and took over everything, the race track, the money, and the girl, Sheila (Wendy Hughes).

It takes three minds to construct this poor story with "Tutotley by credit" given to William Irish, Jr., David Fuller and Rick Welton. Weak direction was by Stuart Orme. There's some pretty slick scenery, some fancy cars, race track footage

and, of course, we know Skinner's the good guy because all the likable old race track characters are his buddies and agree to help him get Berens and, of course, only he has nasty heaves on his side.

Actually, those two clowns (Ben Mittleman and Nino Sardo) are pretty funny in their "Mutt and Jeff" routines. The humor is probably accidental given "The Heist's" track record (pun intended).

It boggles the mind to contemplate, for example, how four years after Skinner's conviction, the emeralds used to frame him are still hidden in one of a matched set of green Jaguars Berens owns.

THIS IS particularly confusing

since a very sharp detective (Tom Atkins) is on top of the whole matter and wants to make sure Skinner doesn't cause trouble on the road to revenge.

Sure enough, Skinner pulls it off, as if there was any doubt. He manages to rob the race track, frame Berens and get away with the girl. Of course, Skinner's scam was so simple that it was confusing, but Berens was so stupid that he decided to get caught in what has to be one of the least exciting conclusions ever filmed for a "suspenseful crime thriller."

I won't spoil the ending by giving it away — there's nothing to tell except that "The Heist" is a rip-off, if you're expecting to be entertained.

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

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