

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" (D, R, 110 minutes) is a perfect example of that sentiment.

The Reasons 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 obsessed), 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 touchstone is with every scene, 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.

Theatrical structure is composed by DeVito's sophomore 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 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 ensues after she's locked Oliver in the steam bath and her cat fighting with his dog also exemplify the simple-minded intelligence which infuses the "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 demeaning conclusion.

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

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 perverse nature of contemporary society, the film probably will do well at the box office.

DEVITO HAS

done this again even though she doesn't have the title role in "She-Devil" (B+, PG-13, 90 minutes). That honor goes to Roseanne Barr who, as Ruth Pickett, proves the old adage about a woman scorched.

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

Barbara finds a vacation for the Griswold family is key for National Lampoon's annual "Parenthood" (A-) (R) 120 minutes.

Larged cast in complex but entertaining story about a family that includes Jason Robards, Steve Martin, Tom Hulce, Marthe Plimpton and Diane West, among others.

"Prancer" (G).

Lighthearted story of nine-year-old girl who falls in injured reindeer just before Christmas.

"Sea of Love" (C) (R) 90 minutes. Al Pacino as a burnt-out detective adds nothing to the cliché nor does a very weak script.

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

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

"We Crave" does it again, this time in the world of electronic video mayhem.

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

Warm, sensitive tale of three sons when it turns out that she has an 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 (Michael Douglas) and Andy (Bryan Larkin), take with Mary Fisher (Meryl Streep), noted author of 32 popular romance best sellers.

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

Hunt is missed, since she and Barr 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 voice back this animated story about Charlie the German Shepherd and Ichy the Dachshund.

"Back to the Future Part II" (B+) (PG-13) 100 minutes.

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

"Dad" (B) (PG) 93 minutes.

Excellent acting by Jack Lemmon, Ted Danson, Zakes Mokae and Olympia Dukakis marrried by clichés.

"Drugstore Cowboy" (Z) (R) 100 minutes.

About as unpleasant as it gets. Four young folks fall in love and drug.

"The Fabulous Baker Boys" (R).

Two brothers — Jeff and Beau Bridges — add Michelle Pfeiffer to their cocktail lounge piano playing act.

"Cross Anatomy" (C) (PG-13) 105 minutes.

Bland, slow, weakly structured romantic comedy about love, first-year med students.

"Harlem Nights" (D) (R) 110 minutes. Nice cars and nifty suits but all that

* Reserved for the colossally bad.

No advanced screening.

By Dan Greenberg

special writer

Pray. Red Foxx, Arsenio 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's tale of mermaid in love with human.

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

Confived, 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.

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The video cassette market continues to grow, since almost everything sells, almost everything is produced. The seemingly available 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 "Ferocious Female Freedom Fighters" and "Rabid Grannies." Those two are from re-releases and some of you may know what that means. It's a certain kind of movie, those that are in other dimensions once again.

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

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

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

Unpleasant, trite detective story stars Michael Douglas.

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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 more or less 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 budgets and released mostly at small art houses. "Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser" has major names behind it.

Clint Eastwood, who proved himself a major jazz fan by directing "Bird" in 1987, fronted much of the money for this project, distributed by Warner Brothers. The film is set 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 indiscernible growl.

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 trumpeter 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 Tommie 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 that aesthetic.

Thelonious Monk

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