

MOVING PICTURES



Crystal (Chloe Webb) is the center of attention for both Jack Moony (Bob Hoskins) and Napoleon Stone (Denzel Washington) in New Line Cinema's "Heart Condition."

'Flashback:' Bit too much

"Flashback" (B-, R, 105 minutes) is an entertaining bit of fluff that shifts gears too often to fulfill its mission as the definitive statement about the '60s.

Despite some clever, sardonic comments on that vanished time in America, the movie isn't thoughtful or serious enough to play in the big leagues. Nonetheless, it's worth your time and money.

San Francisco, 1969, is the point from which the film trips back on what turns out to be comical, albeit cynical, nostalgia.

Straight-arrow FBI agent John Buckner (Kiefer Sutherland) is assigned to get a prisoner, Huey Walker (Dennis Hopper), to Spokane, Wash., for trial. Walker has been on the lam for 20 years, hiding out from a charge of malicious mischief when he disconnected Vice President Spiro Agnew's car from the train as it pulled out of the station on a whistle-stop tour.

The FBI is more concerned, however, with his status as an escaped prisoner. Their pride suffers when a prisoner escapes.

Films such as "Flashback" have a lot to say about the '60s and, as well, about contemporary times. Unfortunately, most of the message is petty lightweight and the frivolity of Walker's character doesn't match the seriousness of the message his fame is supposed to test upon.

There's also a buddy-film hiding in all the shenanigans as the enforcement of guard and prisoner comradeship leads to the usual complications — the menacing local lawman, Sheriff Hightower (Cliff De Young) and the evolution from antagonism to respect and camaraderie between Buckner and Walker.

THERE'S ALSO a few '60s twists — a former flower child, Maggie (Carol Kane) and two aging hippies Barry and Hal (Richard Masur and Michael McKean). The latter two exhibit great and funny guile for having rejected their counter-culture youth for middle-age comfort and success.

While the film has enough laughs, some poignancy and an occasional witty socio-political comment, it's swifly slow getting started, has too many rapid mood shifts and too many unlikely coincidences. But, it's still fun.

In "Heart Condition" (B-, R, 95 minutes), racist Los Angeles Detective Jack Moony (Bob Hoskins) is ca-



the movies
Dan Greenberg

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 colossally bad
*	No advanced screening

ger to nail high-profile, black Beverly Hills lawyer Leon Stone (Denzel Washington). In addition to his racial prejudice and his suspicious about Stone's illegal activities, Moony is upset when his girl, Crystal Gerrity (Chloe Webb) leaves him to take up with Stone.

Then, in a rare stroke of fate, Moony has a heart attack. Stone is killed and Moony is saved by having Stone's heart transplanted. To further aggravate the bigoted detective, Stone turns up as a ghost to advise Moony on how to catch the guys that bumped Stone off.

COMPLICATIONS also include a U.S. Senator dead from a drug overdose — but since the senator was on a committee to pass anti-drug legislation, his death is hushed up. There's a connection, friends, so stay with it — film at eleven.

There's enough plot, a clever idea and excellent performances by Denzel Washington and Bob Hoskins so it's a worthwhile evening even though "Heart Condition" won't

raise everyone's blood pressure. Reviewed by Jason Brown

If you're in the mood for Bette Midler or if you enjoy slow-paced, but well-produced soap operas, then "Stella" (C, PG-13, 105 minutes) is your emotional detergent.

In the title role, based on Olive Prouty's novel, "Stella Dallas," Bette Midler is a sharp-witted, smart-talking and fast-moving barmaid who attracts the attention of young Dr. Dallas (Stephen Collins).

Back in '89 when this, the third and hopefully last "Stella" opens, young doctors were quite naive. How else can you explain young Dr. Dallas being infatuated by a somewhat chunky, late 30ish-looking barmaid dancing on the bar.

It's just too hokey for words. After the dance, Stella refuses Stephen's entreaties for a date with a convincing "stop-one-more" attitude and pretty soon they're hugging and kissing and Stella is pregnant.

Recognizing the difference in their worlds, Stella rejects his marriage proposal, and his money and raises daughter Jenny (Tina Turner) herself.

There's all the usual, soapy ups-and-downs and the remarkable durability of Stella and Stephen. After 20 years, she still looks like a chunky, late 30ish-looking barmaid and he is still young Dr. Dallas. He just dresses better.

Good performances, music and photography can't save this one.

STELLA (PG-13) 110 minutes. Well-known voices back this animated story about Charlie the German Shepherd and his dog the Dachshund.

"Always" (B-) (PG) 110 minutes. Sometimes poignant, sometimes sappy story of airborne fire fighter who returns from death as a spirit.

Back to the Future Part II (B+) (PG) 105 minutes. All your favorite time-travelers are in other dimensions once again.

Blaze (A) (R) 110 minutes. Superb Paul Newman portrayal of Louisiana Governor Earl K. Long with Lolita Davidovich excellent as stripper/grilfriend, Blaze Starr.

"Born to the Fourth of July" (A) (R) 144 minutes. Touching, graphically disturbing, poignant, frightening autobiography of Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise), a paraplegic Viet Vet.

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.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

DFT celebrates animation

By John Monaghan
special writer

The new installment of "The International Tournee of Animation" used to highlight the Detroit Film Theatre winter schedule. Lines typically stretch out the door for the sold-out night of contemporary animation from around the world.

This weekend's three-night run of "The Animation Celebration" offers a somewhat more commercial look at 24 animated shorts from a half dozen countries. These were the most popular films at the Second and Third Los Angeles International Animation Celebrations.

Though often radically different in terms of concept and execution, each animated film brings home the same point — cartoons aren't just for kids anymore.

Take Bill Plympton's brutally funny "25 Ways to Quit Smoking" for example. In a companion piece to his earlier "My Face," a smoker demonstrates fool-proof ways to kick the habit. In a section of self-discipline, the smoker follows each puff with a punch into his impossibly malleable face.

THERE ARE some familiar images to ground a commercial audience. Matt Groening's "The Simpsons" (who currently have their own half-hour television show) are interspersed throughout the program. It's award-winning TV spots for Yoplait and MTV.

Some cartoons even reflect the spirit of international relations. In the American-made "Propaganda," stereotypical Russian and American dancers come together in the performance of traditional cossack and '80s break dancing moves. Unfortunately, it's better in concept than in execution.

More interesting is "The Marathon," a touching Soviet tribute to Mickey Mouse in celebration of his 60th anniversary. Moscow student animators show Mickey cowering on one half of the screen while generations grow up and die on the other, all the while entertained by the cartoon mouse.

The Pixar Studio's "Tin Toy," shown in other festivals, displays just how far computer animation has come in the past decade. Pixar's latest effort, "Knickknack," about a snowman's efforts to break free

from his glass prison, makes its debut here.

MY FAVORITE selection is "Umbabarauma," a five-minute whirlwind of color and rhythm set to the music of Jorge Ben. Talking Heads leader David Byrne commissioned the film to promote a compilation of Brazilian music he released last year.

Directed by Susan Young and Mike Smith, "Umbabarauma" uses a number of techniques — watercolor on paper, ink brush strokes, oil pastels, drawing and cut-outs on film and also conventional cel animation. It goes far beyond the average music video.

Not all of the choices are this good. "Itarg," which starts with an engaging concept of a kingdom that exists solely in a man's dream and will soon be destroyed when he awakes, doesn't live up to its 21-minute running time.

You certainly get your money's worth from "The Animation Celebration." But at 105 minutes, even a party this good goes on a bit too long.

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY, 5201 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-4046 for information (\$25 or \$20 membership).

Stage to Screen — "Witness for the Prosecution" (USA — 1957), 7 p.m. Feb. 9-10. Billy Wilder's suspenseful adaptation of Agatha Christie's courtroom drama. Ailing actress Charles Laughton is convinced of Tyrone Power's innocence but doesn't know what Marlene Dietrich has up her sleeve. Followed by "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (USA — 1958), a faithful version of Tennessee Williams' steamy melodrama, starring Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. Call 833-2323 for information. (\$4)

"Animation Celebration" Feb. 9-11 (call for show times). An excellent collection of animated shorts from around the world. Including Bill Plympton's "25 Ways to Quit Smoking," the Dave Byrne-produced "Umbabarauma" and TV's "The Simpsons."

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 13671 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)

"Abraham Lincoln" (USA — 1930), 7 p.m. Feb. 5. The last film directed

by D.W. Griffith stars Walter Huston as the famous U.S. president.

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

"Exodus" (USA — 1960), 10 a.m. Feb. 6. The Jewish fight for a homeland turned into a sprawling epic adventure by director Otto Preminger. Paul Newman is oddly cast as an Israeli leader who falls for army nurse Eva Marie Saint. As part of the mall's month-long tribute to Paul Newman.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 669-8397 for information. (\$4 general, \$3.25 students and seniors)

Films directed by Stanley Kubrick dominate the selections this week. "The Shining" (USA — 1980), 4 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 6. Jack Nicholson, in one of his best crazy roles, terrorizes his family in a spooky old hotel. Not altogether successful, but like all Kubrick films, hauntingly beautiful.

"Dr. Strangelove" (Britain — 1964), 7 p.m. Feb. 6 and 9 p.m. Feb. 8. In the anti-war black comedy, a paranoid American general (George C. Scott) sends World War III in motion. Bomber pilot Slim Pickens is determined to see that his warheads make it to Russia, while Peter Sellers plays everyone from the U.S.

president to the title character.

"2001: A Space Odyssey" (USA — 1968), 7 p.m. Feb. 8 and 11 a.m. Kubrick's self-masterpiece still has viewers guessing. When a mysterious monolith is discovered on the lunar surface, strange things happen to a group of astronauts. Climaxed by a trip through time and dimensions, which should look extra fabulous when run through the Michigan's new 70mm projector.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17366 Lahser, Detroit. Call 537-2560 for information. (\$2)

"The Greatest Show on Earth" (USA — 1952), 8 p.m. Feb. 9-10. Big top excitement from Cecil B. DeMille, full of then-famous circus performers and hokey melodrama. Jimmy Stewart fares best as a circus clown with a shady past.

TELE-ARTS, 1540 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 963-5918 for information. (\$3.50, \$2.50 students and senior citizens)

"A Virus Knows No Morals" 7:30 p.m. Feb. 5. A darkly funny satire about AIDS misinformation. Among the film's bizarre characters is the owner of a major department store as business, and a government official who feels that all AIDS victims should be sent to concentration camps. Obviously not for all tastes.

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SPIDER-MAN

VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

"The Adventures of Milo & Otis" (1989, color, G, 78 minutes) will be available on cassette Jan. 31. The film is a live-action animal fantasy that received very little play at the local theaters last year. Its rapid appearance on video allows your children to view a "G" film — take advantage of this rare opportunity.

Milo the kitten and his friend, a puppy named Otis, spend their day exploring the barnyard where they were born. Gradually, they branch out in the countryside and Milo is swept away by a rapid river current. Otis tries to rescue his friend and they have marvelous adventures. It should delight the young-at-heart as well as the little children.

At the other end of the scale is "Blood Relations" from Nelson Entertainment. This film is so slow and pretentious that it ought to change the company's name to Nelson Snooze.

Dr. Andreas Wells (Jan Rubeus) is a neurosurgeon with too many quirks in his personality for my taste. I certainly wouldn't let him operate on my brain. His estranged son, Thomas (Kevin Hicks), blames dad for the death of mom. Thomas finally returns home with a beautiful fiancée, Marie Desette (Lydie Denier).

Ray Walston appears as wealthy Grandpa Charles MacLeod. The father/son triangle with Marie shapes up as "Donovan's Brain" with sex, but there wasn't enough of anything to keep me from dozing off. You know, I don't really care what happened and you shouldn't either. Available Jan. 25.

FRANK ZAPPA fans will appreciate the master's Jan. 31 release of a half-dozen tapes although — with the exception of "The Amazing Mr. Bickford" — I can't imagine who else might, if there are any clues in the portions I watched of "Uncle Meat — The Mothers of Invention Movie." It's 120 minutes of color footage shot over a 20-year period, starting in 1967.

This counter-culture hedgehog purportedly presents an alternative view of our time — different, that is, from the plasticized caricatures seen on TV. While I hold no brief for television sit-coms, "Uncle Meat" is even less amusing. It represents home movies at their worst, a terrible lack of discipline and the unmitigated gall to believe that anyone would care to watch two hours of boring nonsense and personal jokes.

"The True Story of Frank Zappa's 21 Motels," "Video From Hell," "Baby Snakes" and "Frank Zappa Live: Does Humor Belong In Music?" are four of the remaining five tapes.

The fifth is one worth your time and attention. Bruce Bickford, aptly billed as "Master of Clay Animation," offers some truly amazing vistas in the little world of clay.

Animation is frame by frame photography and in the case of clay, a frame is shot, the clay is modeled slightly, another frame is exposed and so on. Thus the 55-minute tape contains 79,200 separate sequential photographs, each one requiring planning, record-keeping and modeling of clay.

THE "BICKFORD" musical score was by Frank Zappa, with performances by Ensemble Intercontinental conducted by Pierre Boulez and The London Symphony conducted by Kent Nagano.

Despite stunning claymation, the images and characters in Bickford's work are always complex and generally hostile. Excretion and violent animal-monsters are major motifs as is the loner versus authoritarian figures.

But the truly amazing animation makes it all worth while, particularly the ways in which forms continually evolve from one another. It's hard to imagine the time, patience and artistic vision required to complete such a project. Nonetheless it will be available for \$29.98 on Jan. 31.