

# MOVING PICTURES



Jodie Foster plays Clarice Starling, an FBI agent-in-training who is assigned to interview the criminally insane, in "The Silence of the Lambs."

## 'Mr. and Mrs. Bridge' is not as great as expected

Director James Ivory and producer Ismail Merchant are noted for their finely textured films — particularly "A Room with a View" — films which vividly portray memorable characters who stand as important symbols of human experience.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" (A, PG-13, 127 minutes) is another example of Merchant and Ivory's excellent work although several factors detract. While "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" is very good, it's not as absolutely great as expected.

Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward play the title roles to perfection as the Bridge's marriage evolves during the '30s and '40s. They have three children Carolyn (Margaret Welsh), Douglas (Robert Sean Leonard) and Ruth (Kyra Sedgwick).

As a matter of film continuity, the appearance (and disappearance) of these three children in their parents' lives seem forced and artificial. There is never the sense of a complete family, but rather Walter and India Bridge are the focus of the movie and, while it failed to keep the story flowing, the characters appeal. The same applies to the Bridges' friends in town.

Given the film's importance as a picture of the values of that time and the timeless problems of intergenerational relationships, that seems faulty. Families were much closer in those days and such an erratic pattern is bothersome.

SON DOUGLAS, for example, appears as a nosy child at a family barbecue and suddenly he's an unpleasant adolescent some eight years later as he becomes an Eagle Scout. Why he dislikes his mother is never clear. Is it supposed to be a symbol of his father's proper but distant behavior which characterizes Newman's tightly controlled performances?

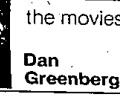
True, with the film's sometimes uncharming and quiet pace, the time flow, "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" has a happy, episodic quality unfortunately off-set by fine character portraits and excellent depiction of behavior in a certain time in America.

The scene design of the "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" is soft and beautiful with just the right physical touches to present that era to contemporary eyes, although Paul Newman in one early scene wears a T-shirt as underwear, something proper men of the '30s would never have done.

Despite its problems, "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" is definitely a film for everyone to see.

The exact opposite is the case when considering Jodie Foster's latest, "The Silence of the Lambs" (C, R, 115 minutes) which should only appeal to those who take ghoulish delight in the torment and suffering of others.

For Foster is Clarice Starling, an FBI agent-in-training who is assigned to interview Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a psychiatrist currently incarcerated in a maximum-security asylum for the criminally insane. Dr. Frederick



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

Chilton (Anthony Heald) is the chief psychiatrist there.

DR. LECTER is a cannibal but FBI Special Agent Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn) who is (or was) Clarice's instructor, thinks she can enlist Lecter's assistance in tracking down Buffalo Bill, James Gumb (Ted Levine), a serial killer who skins his victims.

Cannibalism and a sadistic, psychotic serial killer — now aren't those new topics for an entertaining two hours at the theater, particularly when presented in great and explicit detail?

How this film received an R rating escapes me — probably because there's no sexual activity and as we all realize, depiction of violence is OK. What would they have had to show in order to receive an NC-17 rating?

One of the more troubling features of such a film, unlike cheap slashers, is that this one is technically well-produced and has considerable dramatic and psychological attraction — particularly the loveplay between Clarice and Dr. Lecter.

If no one cares about the violence, however, take a look at the film's continuity problems, there are a good number of them. Those that may be mentioned, without giving away the story, include the unclear relationship between Clarice and agent Crawford — was he a special agent, an academic instructor, a former professor of hers? How did Crawford get assigned to, removed and reassigned to?

Despite its problems, "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" is definitely a film for everyone to see.

## ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

### DFT screens black films

By John Monaghan  
special writer

In 1985, the contents of a film vault in Tyler Texas, revealed a gold mine of film history. The collection contained more than 100 rare feature and shorts made by independent filmmakers with black casts.

"Ever since that discovery, we've wanted to put on a schedule like this," said Lars Baranski, a film curator at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He's referring to "African American Independent Cinema 1930-50," which plays at the Detroit Film Theatre's afternoon program through May 19.

A handful of titles from the Texas collection have made it on the list. Baranski said others have been available from other sources, but rarely get screened. The 16-film retrospective will provide a healthy

sampling of these projects made on a shoestring, but with lots of heart.

This week's opening film, "Scar of Shame" (1927) was the third film from a small production company called The Colored Players Film Corp. It was formed by Philadelphia theater owner David Starkman and a veteran black vaudevillian named Sam S. Shadrack Dudley.

The star is a classically trained pianist who marries a healthy woman to save her from an abusive father. According to Baranski, the low-budget film attempted to capture the quality of the area's best silent productions.

THE REST of the series tracks a number of different genres from melodramas to musicals.

"They have some technical problems," said Baranski, "but they're fascinating."

Sometime the series will

include "Moon Over Harlem" (1939), directed by low-budget master Edgar G. Ulmer. May 28-31, a number of works by Spencer Williams and Oscar Micheaux, the most recognizable directors of the early black movement are also scheduled.

One of the more well-known titles, "Spirit of Youth" (1937) stars Joe Louis as a drifter from Alabama who moves to Detroit and launches a boxing career. It screens May 2-5 with a rare documentary about Louie, "The Last Great Bomber."

In organizing the series, Baranski called on James A. Wheeler, a local film historian and nationally known collector of early black film memorabilia. His collection of posters, films and lobby cards are on display in his own Concept East II Gallery in Detroit.

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## SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (\$5)

"Scar of Shame" (USA — 1927), 1 p.m. Feb. 21-24. In this pioneering silent film, a classically trained pianist, marries a laundry woman to keep her from an abusive father. This was the third film produced by The Colored Players Film Corp., which was formed by a Philadelphia theater owner and a veteran black vaudevillian performer. Kicking off an anniversary tribute to African American Independent Cinema. (Recital Hall) \$12.50.

Also, a lecture by local film historian and collector James E. Wheeler will focus on the African American alternative to the Hollywood system from 1930-50, at 3 p.m. Feb. 19 in the Recital Hall. (Admission \$4, students/senior citizens \$2.50.)

"Leningrad Cowboys Go to America" (Finland — 1989), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 22-23 and 4 and 7 p.m. Feb. 24. The world's most spectacularly untalented rock band leaves the backwoods of Finland for the

mean streets of New York in this free-wheeling road movie from Aki Kaurismaki, the director of "Ariel." (Auditorium) \$5

DETROIT SCIENCE CENTER, 5020 John R., Detroit. Call 577-8400 for information. (\$5 museum admission includes ticket, \$2-\$4 children under 12)

"To the Limit" (USA — 1990), through April 1991. The latest Omnimax spectacular intercuts amazing athletic feats with an analysis of how muscles and blood meet the challenge. Not intended for people with claustrophobia, the movie becomes a first-person "Fantastic Voyage" into the human body.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and M-146, Livonia. Call 476-4466 for information. (free)

"The Last Thing I Saw Paris" (USA — 1984), 10 a.m. Feb. 19. Elizabeth Taylor and Yves Montand star in this updating of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited." As part of a month-long tribute to Taylor.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W.

Maple, Birmingham. Call 855-9090 for information. (\$6, \$3.50 twilight)

"Vincent and Theo" (USA — 1991), call for show times. Robert Altman directed this rehash of the life of Vincent Van Gogh and his supportive brother Theo. While it often provides some new insights, it's more often pretentious and far from a masterpiece.

"Cyrano de Bergerac" (France — 1990). Gerard Depardieu in the role he was born to play — Edmond Rostand's master swordsman and poet, who sacrifices everything for love.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 669-8397 for information. (\$4.50, \$3.50 students and senior citizens)

"The Landscape in the Mist" (Greece — 1988), 10 a.m. Feb. 19. Call for show times. A deceptively simple story of two young Greek children who run away to Germany in search of their father.

"A Better Tomorrow" (Hong Kong — 1986), 10 a.m. Feb. 19. Call for show times.

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## VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg  
special writer

Media Home Entertainment has been known for a wide variety of video offerings — The Chaplin Collection, eight films by the Spanish director Luis Bunuel and all sorts of marginal adventure stuff plus a side-line of sophomore erotica.

Now, as their senior vice president David Bixler notes, they're attempting to fill a perceived void — "People want new films with intelligent scripts, high production values and big name actors."

Two out of three is not bad as their Feb. 19 release, "The Maid" (1990, PG, color, \$19.95) proves. It is the first in Media's recently acquired

package of what they term "high quality motion pictures created specifically for the family video market." The one carries a \$3 million production tag, quite high as video goes.

In the "big name actor" category, "The Maid" stars Martin Sheen as Anthony Wayne, an unorthodox New York investment banker whose supposedly homosexual character is not well-drawn as the film opens and he decides to take a vacation at a top-boutique hotel in Paris.

He is to be teamed with a lovely executive, Nicole (Jacqueline Bisset), and they will co-manage C. P. Oliver's (Jean-Pierre Cassel) investment banking.

NICETAR, Nicole resents sharing management of the department. But Nicole has other problems — a bratty daughter, Marie (Victoria Shale), who drives away every housekeeper her mother hires and the bank's biggest client, Laurent (Ludwig), a bright lecher in Paris who is hot on Nicole's trail.

Big shooter Anthony Wayne walks into this and immediately falls in love with the beautiful Nicole. In making his pitch, Anthony accidentally hires as the maid to care for Nicole's home and daughter.

Production values are high as all this is filmed on pretty slick Parisian locales with some good performances by the principals although Martin Sheen is not at his best doing stage talk.

There's the two out of three but the last "intelligent scripts" doesn't describe Tim Prager's weak screenplay, which falls far short of the mark.

The major problem with "The Maids" is construction of inconsistent characters with simplistic dialogue. Their ability to change personality and behavior with great rapidity just doesn't wash like the Hays Code.

Is this just a character name or is Prager trading on Mad Anthony Wayne, the American Revolutionary General? In any event, Wayne's style

is not playing housemaid in such a way to reveal that fine, warm individual lurking beneath his flamboyance. Far more development is required for credibility.

THE SAME may be said about Marie, the bratty child well-played by Victoria Shale, who becomes everyone's darling the moment Anthony puts his foot down and lets her know who's boss.

These difficulties permeate the set, which lacks the flair and wit of the Martin Sheen into Mr. Bixler. Despite such faults in a predictable script, the film does have its charm, no doubt due to the acting quality and slick production values. Not bad — but from its advertised standards.

February and March promise a considerable number of first-time laserdisc releases with two dozen titles from MGM/UA Home Video and two more from MCA/Universal Home Video. Sam Raimi's "Darkman" (1990, R, color, 96 minutes) and an older Schwarzenegger epic, "Conan the Barbarian" (1981, R, color) are the best by many Bond fans.

All this is good news for owners of laserdisc players as more and more titles of movies in every genre hit the racks.

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