

MOVING PICTURES

'Cop:'
A good
movie

With several new twists in its look, New York's tough street scene "One Good Cop" (A, R, 100 minutes) demonstrates that it's always possible to tell a basic story with a fresh and exciting approach.

Top performances highlight this tense police action-adventure appropriately mixed with romance and family life. Even though the fight scenes tend to strain one's credulity, in much the same way as western heroes firing their six-guns 92 times without reloading might do, the film portrays the city's components realistically.

Artie Lewis (Michael Keaton) and Stevie Dirona (Anthony LaPaglia) are longtime detective-partners on the narcotic squad. Artie's wife Rita (Rene Russo) desperately wants children but they've been unsuccessful and are resigned to a childless life. Stevie's wife has died leaving him with three young daughters.

Perhaps there's an overly obvious irony there, but the scripting, editing, directing and acting are sufficiently well-done to make it work. "One Good Cop" effectively focuses on the strain detectives regularly face and the ways in which they deal with that stress.

When Stevie is killed attempting to rescue a family from their drug-crazed father, Artie is faced with a dilemma — should he care for Stevie's daughters and give Rita the children she desires but that he can't afford — or should he allow the foster parent system to care for the girls?

ALONG THE way, Artie has to deal with the local drug lord, Ben Amato (Tony Plana), who, Artie believes, ultimately was responsible for Stevie's death.

All these elements are artfully interwoven and things never get sappy with the three little girls as Artie solves problems in a unusual way. While one might question the film's final, cynical resolution and the level of violence may bother some, "One Good Cop" is well-done, tense and exciting.

One sign that African-Americans are taking their proper place in the mainstream of American culture is



Danny Glover, Forest Whitaker, Robin Givens and Gregory Hines star in the action adventure/romantic comedy, "A Rage in Harlem."



the movies

Dan
Greenberg

the extent of their presence in motion pictures, an excellent barometer of public reaction and cultural values. Nobody on the outside gets to produce multi-million dollar media.

But as Hollywood has proven conclusively, it takes more than money and position in the mainstream to make good movies. "A Rage in Harlem" (C+, R, 110 minutes) starts out with a bang but ends with a fizzle as the film mixes in more ingredients than necessary and has trouble being an action adventure/romantic comedy.

It's a big, sprawling story that starts down south in the 1950s with a black gang led by Slim (Badja Djola) stealing a lot of gold ore from a white gang. There's a big shoot-out and the black gang's moll, Imabelle (Robin Givens), gets away with the trunk full of gold and makes her way to Harlem.

THERE SHE finds a place to stay with a devout young man, Jackson (Forest Whitaker), whose half-brother, Goldy (Gregory Hines), is a street-smart grifter.

Then, there's Harlem's top mobster, Easy Money (Danny Glover),

and Goldy's transvestite friend, Big Kathy (Zakes Moka), the local madam who runs quite a house. In addition, a couple of cartoon cops plus the staff and management of the funeral parlor where Jackson works fill the screen.

Naturally, Jackson falls in love with Imabelle and everyone in town is hot on the trail of the gold.

Slim and his gang somehow escape from the shoot-out with the white gang in the South and turn up later on in Harlem looking for the gold.

While the story concept contains the basic elements of a good action film — it's based on Chester Himes' novel — the intermixture of romance between devout young man and gang moll, Goldy's redemption, some street comedy and everybody's greed interlarded with excessive violence is more than one film can handle.

"Rich Girl" (R, R) seems to be another teenage romance in the face of poppa's disapproval. In this case, poppa is Mr. Wells, the town's richest man and his sweet little daughter, Courtney, angers him by falling in love with Rick, a rock musician from the wrong side of the tracks. Ah well...

STILL PLAYING:
"Awakenings" (B, PG-13, 121 minutes).

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ALTERNATIVE MOVIE

'Ju Dou' revives 'Postman'

By John Meneghan
special writer

"Ju Dou" has been hailed as a Chinese turn on "The Postman Always Rings Twice" and rightly so. But more interesting than another "erotic tale of forbidden passion," as the ads proclaim, the film is rooted squarely in Chinese culture.

The new film by director Zhang Yi-Mou is enjoying an extended run at the Maple Theatre, due in part to the controversy surrounding its release. "Ju Dou" was the Chinese entry for this year's foreign film Oscar, but was almost pulled by the Chinese government because its con-

tent proved too racy.

The American distributor of "Ju Dou," Miramax, has been playing this up big. Many viewers will be surprised at how tame the film is, offering symbolism and suggestion over explicitness.

Tianqing works in his uncle's dye factory, a maze of wooden wheels, dying pools and reams of colorful fabric hung on towering posts to dry. Actually, Tianqing is the adopted nephew of the wealthy factory owner who has raised him as an indentured servant.

SO WHEN the worker falls in love with his "aunt" Ju Dou, the thought

of killing the old man is a complex one. Ju Dou's idea of simply running away is equally impossible with so much pride at stake.

Oriental films are never short on symbolism, and we have plenty in the scene where Tianqing and Ju Dou first consummate their passion. During their ecstasy, a careless bump of the controls sends wheels spinning and a long sheet of fabric cascading endlessly into a blood red dye vat.

Nor does the film spare us any melodramatic twists of fate. The lovers have a son, which the old man

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SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY, 5201 Woodward, Detroit. Call 832-4048 for information. (\$4 admission; \$25 series membership)

Double feature — "Lifeboat" (USA — 1944) and "The Big Store" (USA — 1941), beginning at 7 p.m. May 10-11. "Lifeboat" is Alfred Hitchcock's wartime classic about survivors of a torpedoed ship who float for days in the title vessel. Among the passengers: Tallulah Bankhead, William Bendix, Hume Cronyn and Walter Slezak. "The Big Store" is a later, lesser Marx Bros. vehicle with Groucho investigating dirty dealings at a big city department store.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information.

"Miracle in Harlem" (USA — 1943), 1 p.m. May 9-12. An ambitious man tries to turn his aunt's kitchen candy business into a major enterprise while fighting off some tedious competition. As part of a tribute to African American Independent Cinema.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 13071 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (free)

"Someone to Remember" (USA — 1943) 7 p.m. May 6. An elderly woman whose son disappeared years before, becomes a foster mother to a hotel full of college boys.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (free)

"Love Me or Leave Me" (USA — 1955), 10 a.m. May 7. The musical biography of Ruth Etting features Doris Day as the tortured singer, with James Cagney as "The Gimp," her domineering racketeer husband. Shown in CinemaScope. As part of a month-long tribute to Cagney.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Birmingham. Call 855-9090 for information. (\$6, \$3.50 (willigt); call for show times)

"La Femme Nikita" (France — 1990). This stylish but empty spy film, a major hit in Europe last year, finds a female hellion transformed into a French super agent. A wild opening and a few good action sequences lived up this warped turn on "Fyngallon."

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VIDEO VIEWING

Still playing catch-up on April video releases, in particular for laser disc owners. On April 24, "Rocky V" (1990, color, PG-13, 105 minutes) in the racks on laser disc, 8mm and video cassette. Hopefully, this indeed will be Rocky's final filmic bout.

The next day, Landmark LaserVision, a subdivision of Republic Pictures, released four classic silent films on laser-disc, testifying to continued growth in that segment of the home viewing market.

The famous German (and later Hollywood) director, Fritz Lang, best known for "Metropolis" and "M" directed a two-part, black-and-white spectacular in 1924 based on the ancient Teutonic saga of the Nibelungenlied. The first part, "Sieg-

fried" (110 minutes), features a dragon 70 feet in length, controlled by 17 technicians, an incredible accomplishment by any standards, particularly for the '20s.

The story traces Siegfried's exploits as he makes a name for himself in ancient legend. The second part, "Kriemhilde's Revenge" (95 minutes), continues the saga as Kriemhilde seeks to avenge Siegfried's death.

Two of the outstanding filmic achievements of the '20s, the German Expressionist "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1919) and the Russian "Battleship Potemkin" (1925) — both black and white and just over an hour in length — are the other two silent classics in this laser disc

release.

ON THE documentary shelf, interesting video cassette releases in April include "Hearts and Minds" (1974, black-and-white and color, R, 115 minutes).

Billed as "a historic visual chronicle," "Hearts and Minds" was originally released at the end of the Vietnam War. It's startling and frightful images, including footage shot in Vietnamese villages, graphically presents the brutality of that war. It won the 1974 Oscar for best documentary feature.

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