

# 'The Commitments' successfully reinvents soul

By John Monaghan  
staff writer

When Jimmy Rabbitt wants to assemble the hardest working band in Ireland, he runs an ad in the paper. Even before gauging the musical abilities of the countless applicants who show up on his doorstep, Jimmy asks them one simple question: Who are your influences?

Sings O'Connor. Slam. U2. Slam. Led Zeppelin. Slam. Harry Manlow. Slam. Jimmy is after soul, genuine soul. James Brown. Marvin Gaye. Percy Sledge. Isaac Hayes.

The rag-tag band he finally assembles learn a lot through the two hours of "The Commitments." Most importantly, these young Dubliners are able to look beyond their dead-end jobs and depressing home lives and respect their mission as "soul artists of Ireland."

Released almost a month ago, "The Commitments" has been gaining momentum by word-of-mouth. It deserves the attention. In many ways, this naive and witty story is the best film yet from Alan Parker,

the very visual director of "Fame," "The Wall" and "Mississippi Burning."

WHILE PARKER effectively plays off the poetry of the steam, garbage, overcast skies and peeling brick of Dublin, he tones that visual style down quite a bit to tell a rocking good tale that refuses to take itself too seriously.

The plot, after all, is straight out of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland — or maybe The Beatles. Early on, Jimmy gathers the group together to view a vintage James Brown performance on TV. Mouths gaping, the kids watch as "The Godfather of Soul" screams into the microphone and then gets led off stage in apparent exhaustion.

"We can't do that," one of them says. "We're awfully white, don't you think?"

That doesn't matter. According to Jimmy, the Irish are the blacks of Europe. Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. The universal language of sex fuels soul, he says. And sure enough, after several evenings of



tickets please

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Jamming in the storeroom above a pool hall, they start to get a feel for the music.

Robert Atkins leads a perfect cast as manager Jimmy, who practices his witty replies to ingrowners in

anticipation of becoming famous. He gets some help from Joey "The Lip" (Johnny Murphy), a considerably older trumpeter who used to blow with the Motown greats. Both try to keep band members from tearing each other apart.

THIS IS no easy task. When the band begins to gain some notoriety, lead singer Deco (Andrew Strong), a slobby bus conductor with more than a passing resemblance to Van Morris-

son, gets a tempting offer from another group.

If that doesn't cause enough friction, the female back-up singers fight over unlikely Casanova Joey.

In other hands, "The Commitments" would have turned into a bitter, probably tasteless rock'n'roll spoof. This is surprisingly good-natured, paying tribute to soul greats in well executed cover versions of "Chain of Fools," "Slip Away" and "Mustang Sally."

DINING & ENTERTAINMENT

## On the Town



Robert Atkins is Jimmy in Alan Parker's "The Commitments," the story of a band that brings the soul sound to Ireland.

### SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY, Detroit Public Library, 5201 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-4048 for more information. (\$4 double feature; \$25 membership)

Preston Sturges — "The Lady Eve" (USA — 1941) and "Unfaithfully Yours" (USA — 1948), 7 p.m. Oct. 11-12. A pair of classic comedies from writer/director Sturges. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, "Lady Eve" stars sexy Barbara Stanwyck out to nab millionaire snake expert Henry Fonda. Always a treat. After intermission, Rex Harrison plays a symphony conductor who dreams about doing in an unfaithful wife (Linda Darnell).

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

"The Story of Boys and Girls" (Italy — 1988), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Oct. 11-12 and 5 and 7 p.m. Oct. 13. The preparation and execution of a wedding in Italy sets the scene for this robustly funny film by first-time director Pupi Avati. Eat before seeing this one, as it contains the best food scenes since "Babet's Feast."

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

"Melody Ranch" (USA — 1940), 7 p.m. Oct. 7. Gene Autry plays a radio singing star who returns to his hometown to become honorary sheriff only to find the town riddled with corruption. Co-starring Ann Miller, Jimmy Durante and George "Gabby" Hayes.

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

"That Touch of Mink" (USA — 1952), 10 a.m. Oct. 8. Wealthy playboy Cary Grant chases Doris Day in a fluffy comedy continuing the mall's month-long tribute to leading men.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$4)

"Anatomy of a Murder" (USA — 1959), 8 p.m. Oct. 8. Filmed entirely in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Otto Preminger's masterpiece stars James Stewart as a jazz-loving attorney who'd rather fish than practice law. He comes off the lake long enough to take a controversial murder case where the motives remain delightfully ambiguous. Featuring a killer Duke Ellington score.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 963-8690 for information. (\$5, \$3.50 students and senior citizens)

"The Miracle" (Britain — 1990), through Oct. 12 (call for show times). From Neal Jordan, director of "Mona Lisa," a drama set in the misty resort town of Bray, Ireland, about the relationship between two local youths and a "fortysomething" American woman (Beverly D'Angelo).

"Repulsion" (Britain — 1963), 7 p.m. Oct. 8-9. Roman Polanski's bold and frightening study of a young woman (Catherine Deneuve) whose nightmares grow more and more real.

— John Monaghan



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