

'Hope' reaffirms his independence

Writer/director John Sayles continues by choice to work outside of mainstream Hollywood. Supposedly, this affords him the opportunity to create unique films from the heart, even if they lack certain production values.

It's surprising then that "City of Hope," currently on screen at the Maple Theatre in Bloomfield, has little more bite than a better-than-average television drama.

In the first 10 minutes, we are introduced to a dizzying number of residents from Hudson City, N.J., a microcosm of contemporary urban life.

Nick, played by Vincent Spano, has a cushy construction job kept secure by his powerful contractor father, Dad (Tony LoBlanco), meanwhile, is being pressured by friends in the mayor's office to have an apartment building torched so that a



tickets please

John Monaghan

high-rise shopping center can be built on the site.

The lives of several people intertwine shortly before and after the apartment building is set ablaze.

In another part of town, police brutality against a pair of young blacks leads to a boy's random beating of a white college professor. The boys contend that they were only defending themselves against the man, who propositioned them for sex. The media jumps on the story, and now the victim becomes the

accused.

SAYLES HAS written himself another choice part as an arsonist who fronts a downtown garage. He was once the best friend of Nick's brother, even took the rap for him in a drunk driving accident. Now limping with an artificial leg, he provides the film's most cynical view of rampant city corruption.

The filmmaking Sayles has a different view indeed.

In "City of Hope," as in his earlier

"Matewan," Sayles has set himself up as a friend of the working man. He makes movies like Bruce Springsteen writes songs, firmly in touch with the blue collar pulse.

He presents his urban dwellers as realistically as possible, lit beneath harsh streetlamps or crammed in claustrophobic apartments and patrol cars. He firmly roots you in a big city that could be Detroit just as easily as Hudson.

"City of Hope" is not a bad movie. It's ambitious, complex, and yes heartfelt. Most admirably, it doesn't offer pat answers.

While friends sitting next to me wallowed in its bleakness and futility, I found the film's last reel brimming with hope, or at least some form of justice.

Any film that can provoke conversation more than 10 minutes after its screening is well worth a look.

SCREEN SCENE

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

"Camp de Thiaroye" (Senegal/Tunisia — 1988), 7 p.m. Nov. 4. In this African epic, a band of Senegalese soldiers return from heroic fighting alongside the French during World War II. From Ousmane Sembene, sometimes called the dean of African cinema.

"Faces" (USA — 1968), 3 and 6 p.m. Nov. 10. Continuing a five-film tribute to the late John Cassavetes, this story of a marriage on the rocks was a breakthrough for the maverick director, both with the critics and at the box office. John Marley and Gena Rowlands star.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 1371 Michigan Ave. Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for more information. (Free)

"The Senator Was Indiscreet" (USA — 1947), 7 p.m. Nov. 4. Political satire about an aging, ambitious senator (William Powell), whose valuable "diary" keeps party members in line. With Ella Raines.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22018 Woodward, Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$4)

"Brazil" (USA — 1985), 8 p.m. Nov. 5. Terry Gilliam ("The Fisher King") directed this occasionally brilliant, often exasperating science fiction epic about a young bureaucrat in the future (Jonathan Pryce) who tries to break free of totalitarian society. Robert DeNiro co-stars.

MAIN THEATRE, 118 N. Main, Royal Oak. Call 942-0180 for show times. (\$6)

"My Own Private Idaho" (USA — 1991). The latest from Gus van Sant, the director of "Drugstore Cowboy." Here, Keanu Reeves and River Phoenix play a pair of street hustlers who make their way from Washington state to Idaho on their way to Rome, where they hope to come to grips with their past. Slow-paced and inventive, though it bogs down when the director decides to borrow from Shakespeare's "Henry IV."

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$6, \$3.50 twilight). "Homicide" (USA — 1991). A mul-



Niall Byrne walks a thin line between fantasy and reality in the Irish import, "The Miracle," playing at the Star John R Theatre in Madison Heights.

ti-layered cop drama about an inner-city police officer whose long-suppressed ethnic background lures him into the darker side of the law and crime. Another collaboration between writer/director David Mamet and actor Joe Mantegna.

"City of Hope" (USA — 1991). From independent director John Sayles, a complex story about life in a fictional New Jersey city. Vincent Spano plays a contractor's son who tries to break free of the oppressive power structure.

STAR JOHN R, 32288 John R (at 14 Mile Road), Madison Heights. Call 585-2070 for show times. (\$6, \$3.50 before 6 p.m.).

"The Miracle" (Ireland — 1991). When a beautiful blond American (Beverly D'Angelo) arrives in an Irish seaside town, a teenager's fascination with her grows into an obsession. This very personal film from Neil Jordan ("Mona Lisa") walks a thin line between fantasy and reality. Just don't take its melodramatic storyline too seriously.

— John Monaghan

'Metropolitan': Uppercrusty film

It occurred to me after watching the video of "Metropolitan" why this film wouldn't find a wide audience. The same reason Jane Austen doesn't make the New York Times best seller list. This is a tale of manners and society. This is a film about New York upper crust kids, a couple of whom discuss Jane Austen despite one not having read her work.

Set in Manhattan during a Christmas vacation (not so long ago), "Metropolitan" focuses on a small group of these well-dressed preppies as they attend "deb" parties and re-group at someone's apartment to spend the balance of the night talking, dancing or playing a few hands of strip poker.

A new acquaintance of the group, who opposes the formal attire of deb parties on principle, is rather politely shanghaied into attending a party. He continues his protestations for awhile but eventually becomes part of the group.

It becomes clear after awhile that the newcomer, played by Edward Clements, has acquired some of his principles in response to his parents'



pass the popcorn

LeAnne Rogers

divorce and his move into a cramped weekend apartment with his mother. He looks longingly at the fashionable high-rise where his father and his new wife are living.

TAYLOR NICHOLS plays the thoughtful, philosophical member of the little group talking incessantly about God or fear about downward mobility. Another major concern for him is his conviction that preppies like himself and his friends are doomed to failure in life.

There's a rather funny scene in a bar where Clements and Nichols meet a middle-aged preppy, who matter of factly describes himself as a failure. The worst part about being in Manhattan, he tells the young

pair, is running into more successful contemporaries.

But he does disagree about the pre-destination argument. "You have to accept that you are not doomed to failure, you just do it," he says knowingly.

The rather bookish and boyish Carolyn Farina develops a crush on the newcomer, who naturally doesn't notice her adoring glances. Likewise she doesn't notice the attentions of another young man.

Farina seems only slightly surprised when, after a lively discussion about Jane Austen's work, Clements cheerfully confesses never having read the book. "You don't have to read a book to have an opinion about it," he says.

THE FILM takes an easygoing look at these characters, whose lives consist of going to parties in formal clothes, shopping or just hanging out. Director/writer Whit Stillman doesn't present the group in a critical or harsh way. As several characters comment about each, they really are basically good people — just not very bright or motivated or caring or deep. I could go on.

With the exception of Clement, Nichols and Farina, you don't get the idea these characters will improve with age. Youth and experience will help these three develop their potential.

Other than Clements' divorced mother, parents aren't seen in the film and from the conversation don't have a lot of contact with these young adults.

The acting by most of the actors is good and you eventually get interested in and like some of the characters, but there is no strong draw. It's just that there isn't a lot more people can identify with in the film.

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