

Kurosawa creates a masterpiece with 'Rhapsody'

At 81 Akira Kurosawa hasn't lost a bit of the vitality, poetic insight, or talent for composing unforgettable images. In his 25th film "Rhapsody in August," the respected director creates a complex family drama revolving around modern-day Nagasaki.

A quartet of children spend the summer with their grandmother (Sachiko Murase), who lives in a traditional dwelling just outside the city. The very westernized kids, sporting T-shirts emblazoned with Brooklyn and M.I.T., are a bit miffed that grandma still doesn't have television, but enjoy themselves nonetheless.

This particular summer they learn about grandma's large family of brothers and sisters (at least 10) when one of them contacts her from

Hawaii. He moved there long ago, made a fortune growing pineapples, and now invites the family to come out to visit his plantation.

Tension arises through history. The atom bomb blast at Nagasaki at the end of World War II still wears heavily on the townspeople, including grandma, who lost her school teacher husband in the city.

She no longer holds bitterness for the United States. She concludes that war itself, not individual countries, is responsible for the wholesale devastation.

SURPRISINGLY, it's the kids who pick up on grandma's feelings most quickly. Their parents, young children during the bombing in 1945, selfishly hope their newly forged relationship with the rich American rela-



tickets please

John Monaghan

tives will lead to jobs in the States.

Kurosawa makes his statements with bold brush strokes and imagery. Elderly natives make regular pilgrimages to the Nagasaki schoolyard, where playground equipment remains twisted and charred. The kids seek out these monuments in an attempt to get closer to their family history.

The director has an incredible way

of bringing characters to life and placing them in the most beautiful groupings. He delights in photographing the children, who file past the swaying reeds to their grandma's house or linger in amazement at the pair of charred trees ("a double suicide" they call it) that figures prominently in an old family scandal.

You can ponder endlessly the meaning of ants flowing single file

up the stem of a blooming flower. Or you can simply enjoy it as one of Kurosawa's incredible color compositions.

In Kurosawa's previous film "Dreams," he oddly cast director Martin Scorsese as Vincent Van Gogh. Here, Richard Gere makes a brief appearance as the Japanese-American nephew who somehow never puts two and two together when thinking about his aunt in Nagasaki. He arrives to smooth things over.

PERHAPS THE director sees Gere as the embodiment of American popular culture, which is at odds with tradition throughout the film. It is unlikely that the uncompromising Kurosawa has decided after all these years to start pandering to the inter-

national box office.

For Gere's part, he seems honored to be working in a film of this caliber, carefully immortalizing his Japanese lines. Like his character, he is a conspicuous intruder in Nagasaki, and overcomes the awkwardness in a couple of touching scenes.

The most ironic thing about "Rhapsody in August" is its timing, opening shortly after America remembered the bombing of Pearl Harbor during its 50th anniversary last December. Kurosawa insists this is merely a coincidence, but has nonetheless gotten us to look at the devastation of war from a unique point of view.

The year's first must-see film plays for a second weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

SCREEN SCENE

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

"Rhapsody in August" (Japan - 1991), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Jan. 24-25 and 4 and 7 p.m. Jan. 26. Four children spend a summer with their grandmother, who shares with them her memories of brothers and sisters and her husband, who was killed by the atom bomb explosion in Nagasaki. Richard Gere plays the woman's Japanese-American nephew in the opening film of the DFT's exciting new season.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave. Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$3, \$2 students and senior citizens)

"2001: A Space Odyssey" (USA - 1968), 8 p.m. Jan. 20-22. Kicking off an ambitious tribute to director Stanley Kubrick, a rare big screen showing of the science fiction classic. Keir Dullea plays a turn-of-the-century spaceman embarking on a battle of man against machine and ultimately man and the unknown. The final reel is still a mind-blower. "Jimi Hendrix on the Isle of Wight" (USA - 1991), 11:30 p.m. Jan. 24-25. The guitar legend is captured in concert just 18 days before his untimely death. Here, on England's Isle of Wight, he delivers a superb set, including "Voodoo Child" and "Red House."

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-0990 for show times. (\$5, \$2.50 twilight)

"Madame Bovary" (France - 1991). Emma Bovary (Isabelle Huppert) is a doctor's wife whose longing for romance results in several lustful flings and luxury spending on borrowed money. French director Claude Chabrol adapts Gustave Flaubert's novel with typical brilliance and moral ambiguity.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information. (\$5, \$4.25 students and senior citizens)

"Poison" (USA - 1991), through Jan. 25 (call for show times). A controversial trio of tales by director Todd Haynes, all inspired by Jean Genet and AIDS.

"Strangers in Good Company" (Canada - 1991), Jan. 24-30 (call for show times). A group of seven elderly women and their female driver survive for several days when their bus breaks down in the country. They forage for food (even use pantyhose to net trout in a nearby river) and reminisce and learn about each other.

"Hip, Hip Hurrah!" (Sweden - 1987), 7 p.m. Jan. 21-22. Making its American debut here, a fantasy about life and love among a group of Scandinavian artists.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17360 Lahser, Detroit. Call 537-2560 for information. (\$2.50)

"The Adventures of Robin Hood" (USA - 1938), 8 p.m. Jan. 24-25 (organ overture begins at 7:30 p.m.). Errol Flynn is the definite outlaw of Sherwood Forest in the colorful Warner Brothers action flick. The splendid supporting cast includes Olivia de Havilland, Claude Rains, Basil Rathbone and Alan Hale. Housling score by Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

STATE WAYNE THEATRE, 35310 Michigan Ave. West, Wayne. Call 326-4660 for information. (\$2, \$1 children and senior citizens)

"Ben Hur" (USA - 1959), 7 p.m. Jan. 22-26. The chariot race is still the highlight of this epic story, starring Charlton Heston and set in the time of Christ. Always a treat on the big screen.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN, Room 138 Science Building, Evergreen between Ford Road and Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. Call 593-5433 for information. (Free)

"Viridiana" (Spain - 1961), 8 p.m. Jan. 24. A novice nun visits her lecherous uncle (Fernando Rey) in this classic study of sexuality, religion and madness by director Luis Bunuel.

— John Monaghan



Todd Haynes' "Poison" is a controversial trio of tales, all inspired by Jean Genet and AIDS.

Bridges does right by 'Boys'

The term "lounge act" could probably mean different things to different people. To me, it conjures up an act in cheesy tuxedos and sequined dresses doing "Feelings" to a boss nova beat. When you think about how painful it is to listen to that kind of music, think about what torture a talented musician must go through making a living as part of a lounge act.

That's exactly where Jack Baker, played by Jeff Bridges, finds himself in the very good and strangely seldom seen film, "The Fabulous Baker Boys." Jack and big brother Frank, played by Beau Bridges, have been playing piano tandem on the lounge circuit for most of their lives.

Bookings for the duo are getting spotty so Frank suggests adding a girl singer to liven up the act. There's a hilarious series of singers, all shapes, sizes and vocal ranges, who turn out for the audition.

A former escort service worker, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, starts off on the wrong foot but manages to land the gig.

THE ADDITION of Pfeiffer, who does a nice job with her vocals, revitalizes the bookings for the act, moving them to progressively nicer clubs. No more fake palm trees. Pfeiffer does an especially sultry version of "Makin' Whoopee" in a red dress while working the top of a Grand piano.

And the addition of Pfeiffer to the long-standing duo in part leads to



pass the popcorn

LeAnne Rogers

some friction between the brothers but not in ways that might be expected.

"Anyone with parents, siblings or even friends who remained close since childhood, can spot the behavior patterns of the Baker boys, carried on from their youth.

Older brother Frank, who freely admits being less gifted than his brother, is a family man who takes care of the business end. He lines up bookings and makes sure the bills are paid. Jack arrives minutes before he is supposed to be on stage, smokes constantly, drinks a lot and generally takes no responsibilities for himself professionally or for personal relationships.

As his brother jokes, Frank may be an easy target for jokes but thanks to him the brothers have never worked day jobs.

Frank has also made it easy for his little brother not to have to take any chances or push himself musically. Jack's not a happy boy but he isn't really willing to do anything about it. It's also been easier to let Jack to blame his brother for being stuck on the lounge circuit

than to take a chance playing the jazz he loves.

IT'S BECAUSE of that that Pfeiffer's character, who is much more willing to take a chance, has such an impact on the brothers. The relationship between the three as a group and in various combinations grow and change during the story.

In many ways, the film is tightly focused study of three characters and the need to be honest with and about yourself. It's a rather low key film with a very sense of humor. All three actors do a fine job creating characters with distinct personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Jeff Bridges, who can nearly always be counted on for a good performance, does a terrific job as Jack Baker, who gets the most focus in the film.

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