

Sincerity adds spice to 'Mississippi Masala'

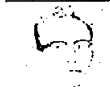
"Mississippi Masala" isn't wild, hip, or outrageous. Its director doesn't possess an over-abundance of style.

Yet there's something irresistible and sincere about Mira Nair's love story about the controversial relationship between a black man and an Indian woman in the deep South.

Nair previously directed the acclaimed "Salaam Bombay!" the story of a poverty-stricken boy on the mean streets of India.

"Mississippi Masala," currently at the Maple Theatre, opens with an Indian family fleeing Idi Amin's government in Uganda for London and finally the United States.

Years later, the father (Roshan Sethi) writes countless letters to the current Ugandan government in the hopes of reclaiming his property. His wife, and especially daughter (Sarla Choudhury), have no interest in returning.



tickets please
John Monaghan

DENZEL WASHINGTON plays Demetrius, an ambitious Mississippi native who runs his own carpet-cleaning business. He first dates Mina to make an old girlfriend jealous and then finds himself falling in love with her.

The relationship doesn't sit well with the Indians, who claim to profess a kinship to African Americans because they're both people of color. Inter-racial dating is another story. The black community, meanwhile, chastises Demetrius for sleeping with what they term a white woman.

Where Spike Lee's "Jungle Fever" was a topical, almost clichéd, statement about black-and-white relations, the message here is more cleverly shaded and sincere.

The understated performance by Denzel Washington makes you forget he's a star. He looks appropriately straight arrow in his spiffy blue carpet-cleaning uniform. He proudly displays his business motto, "Your dirt is our bread and butter," on his van and in his sales pitch.

ROSHAN SETHI, so effective in "My Beautiful Laundrette," brings a wonderfully obsessed quality to the father who longs for home. He adds another touch of professionalism to what is often an uneven production.

Sarla Choudhury, likable enough as Mina, seems uncomfortable next to a powerhouse like Washington. You can almost sense him trying to tone down his performance so he won't overshadow her.

Writer Sooni Taraporevala, meanwhile, creates black characters who remain just that — black characters. There is considerably more insight into the complexities of the families who work and reside in a growing number of Indian-owned motels.

At almost two hours, "Mississippi Masala" unfolds so leisurely that it almost drags. Director Nair is lucky to have Ed Lachman behind the camera, whose obvious love of the wild colors in the Indian clothing and homemade shrines gives "Masala" its true flavor.



Denzel Washington plays Demetrius, an ambitious Mississippi native who runs his own carpet-cleaning business in "Mississippi Masala."

SCREEN SCENE

CAPITOL THEATRE, 121 University, Windsor. Call 519-254-1141 for information. (14)

"Hour of the Wolf" (Sweden — 1988), 9 p.m. Feb. 24-25. Max von Sydow plays a painter who, along with wife Liv Ullmann, retreats to a desert island only to be haunted by apparitions. Ingmar Bergman directs.

"Twenty-One" (Britain — 1991), Feb. 25-March 1 (call for show times). In her first starring role, Patsy Kensit plays a beautiful English woman who charms men in Manhattan, London and Venice.

"28th Street" (USA — 1991), Feb. 27-March 1 (call for show times). Anthony LaPaglia plays the luckiest man in Manhattan, whose good fortune turns when his father (Danny Aiello) gets involved.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 622-3730 for information. (15)

"35 Up" (Britain — 1991), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 28-29. In 1963, director Michael Apted told the story of a group of seven-year-old schoolchildren. Every seven years since he has caught up with them to discover if their dreams and ambitions have been fulfilled.

"The Architecture of Doom" (Sweden — 1991), 4 and 7 p.m. March 1. The Nazi obsession with cleanliness is explored in this documentary from Peter Cohen.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. Call 943-3037 for information. (Free)

"Diabolique" (France — 1955), 7 p.m. Feb. 24. Henri-Georges Clouzot directed this bizarre and much-mimicked story of the wife and mistress of a brutal schoolmaster who plot to kill him.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAPE, 23918 Woodward Avenue, Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$2, \$2 students and senior citizens)

"The Last Waltz" (USA — 1978), 8 p.m. Feb. 24-25. Martin Scorsese directed this farewell concert by The Band. Robbie Robertson and company are joined by Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Van Morrison, Eric Clapton, Emmylou Harris, Dr. John, Ringo Starr and Ron Wood.

"Lolita" (Britain — 1962), 8 p.m. Feb. 26. James Mason plays Humbert Humbert, who obsesses about a precocious and usually amply teenager (Sue Lyon). Peter Sellers and Shelley Winters co-star in Stanley Kubrick's watered-down but still fascinating version of the Vladimir Nabokov novel.

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"The Cure in Orange" (Britain — 1987), 9 and 11:30 p.m. Feb. 28-29. Musical group The Cure is captured live in Orange, France in this concert film.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4125 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-0090 for show times. (16, 12-55 willight)

"Naked Lunch" (USA — 1991), David Cronenberg's flipped-out treatment of the novel by William Burroughs. Peter Weller stars as an exterminator whose addiction to drug powder sends him on a one-way trip to a drug-inspired fantasy.

"Mississippi Masala" (USA — 1992), A spicy love story about an African-American man and an Indian-Ugandan woman who find themselves embroiled in scandal that threatens to unravel the delicate balance between their two cultures.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 688-8387 for information. (16, 14 students and senior citizens)

"Let Him Have It" (Britain — 1991), 8:50 p.m. Feb. 24-27 and 9:20 p.m. Feb. 28. A pair of teenagers in post-war England plot to rob a warehouse but end up killing a policeman in the process. What happens to these would-be gangsters is an eerie, true-life story which ramifications are still being felt in the British legal system.

"National Film Board of Canada Animation Festival," 7 p.m. Feb. 24, 27 and 7:30 p.m. Feb. 28. An innovative collection of short works. Some, like "The Big Salt," are already well-known. Others, like "Two Sisters" by Caroline Leaf and "Let Drew's" by Every Day's Guide to the Playground, are quickly becoming classics.

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

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"Rio Bravo" (USA — 1959), Feb. 28-March 1 (call for show times). John Wayne stars in the overrated but still entertaining Howard Hawks western about a sheriff trying to keep a criminal from busting out of prison. Dean Martin, Angie Dickinson, Ricky Nelson and Walter Brennan lend a hand.

"Cabaret" (USA — 1972), Feb. 28-March 1 (call for show times). Bob Fosse directed this stylized musical about an American singer (Liza Minnelli) in Berlin just before World War II.

— John Monaghan

Why trade unions? See 'Matewan'



pass the popcorn
LeAnne Rogers

aren't much better than slaves.

As a company man explains, they will be paid only in company script, which will be spent at the company store and to reimburse the company for transportation, tools, lodging and just about anything conceivable.

AFTER A run-in with the supplanting miners, Few Clothes Johnson, played robustly by James Earl Jones, and other black workers realize they are being used as scab workers.

Johnson will overlook a racial slur, noting "that's the way white folks are," but he is indignant at being labeled a scab.

Like the union organizer, the town sheriff played by David Strathairn, tries to avoid violence in the growing

confrontation. The difference is the sheriff, a quiet war veteran, will take action to protect his townspeople and to resolve the crisis in an unpredictable way.

WRITER/DIRECTOR John Sayles makes it clear where he stands as workers rebel against a company that treats them as highly expendable parts of their highly profitable operation.

In an ironic turn, Sayles appears in "Matewan" as a Bible-thumping preacher who rallies against unions as the devil incarnate. In a one-company town, there is no being neutral when a labor war begins.

"Matewan" is a rich textured film with uniformly good performances and well drawn characters. The struggle for decent wages and working conditions affects a wider circle than the workers. It affects their families and often widows and children.

Sayles has made a compelling heartfelt film about what might be expected to be a rather predictable story.

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Evening	Friday	March 27, 1992	Reserved (Rows 10-18)	\$600	\$475
			Ringside Ends (Rows 1-9)		
9:30 A.M.	Saturday	March 14, 1992	Ringside (Rows 1-9)	\$700	\$475
Morning	Saturday	March 21, 1992	Reserved (Rows 10-18)	\$600	\$475
			Ringside Ends (Rows 1-9)		
5:30 P.M.	Sunday	March 15, 1992	Ringside (Rows 1-9)	\$700	\$475
Evening	Sunday	March 22, 1992	Reserved (Rows 10-18)	\$600	\$475
			Ringside Ends (Rows 1-9)		
7:30 P.M.	Wednesday	March 18, 1992	Ringside (Rows 1-9)	\$600	\$475
Evening	Thursday	March 19, 1992	Reserved (Rows 10-18)	\$500	\$475
	Wednesday	March 25, 1992	Ringside Ends (Rows 1-9)		
1:30 P.M.	Sunday	March 15, 1992	Ringside (Rows 1-9)	\$700	\$475
Afternoon	Saturday	March 21, 1992	Reserved (Rows 10-18)	\$600	\$475
	Sunday	March 29, 1992	Ringside Ends (Rows 1-9)		

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