



Ed Harris (left) is Frankie Flannery and Joe Vitell is Borrelli in director Phil Joanou's gangster tale "State of Grace."

# Film is ambitious, but script falls from 'State of Grace'

You can take the boy out of Hell's Kitchen but you can't take Hell's Kitchen out of the boy seems to be the premise of director Phil Joanou's gangster tale "State of Grace."

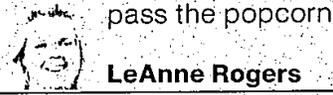
A raven-haired Sean Penn plays a guy from the west-end New York neighborhood who suddenly re-appears after dropping out of sight for a few years. After connecting with an old buddy, played by Gary Oldman, Penn starts working for the Westies, an Irish gang based in Hell's Kitchen.

Penn's reasons for returning and linking up with the Westies is initially a little murky. The situation becomes clearer as the story progresses, it just never really becomes very plausible.

Unscripted with long dirty hair and a whiskey bottle never out of reach, Oldman is a populist criminal. He rails against the Irish being pushed out of the neighborhood as it undergoes redevelopment.

"The yuppies are thicker than roaches," he complains to Penn. Noble sentiments from a man who makes his living strong arming protection money and kickbacks from local Irish business owners.

HEADING THE local gangsters is Oldman's older brother, played by Ed Harris, whose goal is to become a yuppie nabster. Harris has moved his family to a suburb in New Jersey



pass the popcorn  
**LeAnne Rogers**

and is attempting to put a respectable veneer on his life.

When Harris tries to connect with rival Italian gangsters, it's only a matter of time before his out-of-control brother will become a serious obstacle on his road to upward mobility.

Penn is supposed to be the center of the film, his story being one of attempting to find the state of grace from the title. He just isn't terribly successful in creating this character, largely due to the script, I suspect.

In the end, it's Oldman and Harris who are more memorable. Oldman is very good being devoted to his friends to the point of extreme violence. He's not especially likeable even in his better moments but always compelling. As always, Oldman, a British actor, meshes seamlessly with the American cast members.

Harris is a rough violent man, desperately trying to make the transition to a yuppie clan. A large part of the problem is that we get very little insight into the characters, some-

# 'Toto' compels, depresses

You can walk out of some movies and never think about them again. Others take you on a roller coaster ride of twists and turns that leave you emotionally exhausted, yet pondering the directions you've been taken.

"Toto Le Heros," a new French import playing at the Maple and other local theaters, falls firmly into the latter category. This bold, stylized look at one man's tragedy-filled life is both depressing and oddly compelling at the same time.

Thomas is 60 years old and living in a nursing home. He dreams of escaping and murdering an old rival. According to his crystal-clear memory, a hospital fire led to a frantic grabbing of infants that placed him in the care of a family much poorer than the one into which he was born.

As Thomas grows older, he watches that other baby, Alfred, live a life of luxury and eventually inherit the family business — a chain of successful grocery stores.

In a series of flashbacks, Thomas recalls minute details of his life, including the disappearance of his pilot father and the strong attraction to a sister Alice, who of course is not his sister at all. His neighbor Alfred displays the actual incestuous

## tickets please

### John Monaghan

desire by falling in love with Alice as well.

It's precisely this kind of twist that makes the film so fascinating. The complex narrative of "Toto Le Heros" recalls French "New Wave" cinema at its most experimental. But unlike the free-wheeling Truffaut and Godard, first-time director Jaco Van Dormael knows exactly where this film is headed.

He even tosses in a few of Hitchcock's red herrings along the way. The adult Thomas, a la "Vertigo," loves a woman solely because she reminds him so much of Alice. She looks the same, dresses the same, even plays the same musical instrument.

The audience is left with questions: Does she have the same birthmark that Alice so slyly points out early in the film? Could it in fact be her?

Four actors play Thomas in various stages of life, including French cinema veteran Michel Bouquet, whose narration is the thread that holds the film together.

Bouquet's performance is perhaps the screen's best study of complete and total bitterness. Thomas' violent fantasy life often leads him to jump up during an irritating situation and bash someone's brains out or force a handful of pills down a nagging nurse's gullet. Of course, it's all a dream.

At other times, he is the title's avenging Toto, a hard-boiled detective who single-handedly guns down a roomful of villains who have abducted his parents.

Thomas' string of often avoidable tragedies are difficult to watch, so the best part of "Toto Le Heros" may come long after the lights go up. Few recent films have had such a stinging resonance.

## SCREEN SCENE

**DETROIT FILM THEATRE.** Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (45)

"Where Angels Fear To Tread" (Britain - 1991). 7, 9:30 a.m. April 17-18; 4, 7 p.m. April 19. From the pen of the great E.M. Forster comes this romantic story about an attractive widow (Helen Mirren) who is packed off to Italy to (unsuccessfully) "keep her out of mischief."

**HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY.** 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2037 for information. (Free)

"The Silent Witness" (USA - 1978). 7 p.m. April 13. Using modern scientific techniques, scientists investigate the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin as being Christ's burial cloth. This documentary also traces the known history of the shroud.

**MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE.** 2218 Woodward, Ferndale. Call 544-0000 for information. (8; \$3.49 students/seniors)

"Life Is Sweet" (Britain - 1991). 8 p.m. April 13-15. Dad never finishes the house projects he starts, the teenage twins are misfits, while the mother (Allison Steadman) maintains an unbelievable sunny disposition. This story of a dysfunctional family, directed by Mike Leigh ("High Hopes") won the National Film Critics Award as best picture of 1991.

"Secret Places" (Britain - 1985). 7, 9 p.m. April 16. Set in a boarding

school during World War II, this is the story of the blossoming relationship between a lonely, gawky teenage schoolgirl and a worldly, pretty German refugee. A benefit for Health Emergency Assistance of Detroit. Tickets \$6 in advance; \$8 at the door.

"Lunatics: A Love Story" (USA - 1991). 8, 10:30 p.m. April 17; 8 p.m. April 18. Filmed in Pontiac and other Detroit-area locales, "Lunatics" was produced by Renaissance Pictures, the film company that once called Ferndale home. In it, a struggling poet and ex-mental patient (Ted Raimi) experiences a series of wild hallucinations. Director Josh Becker and Raimi will be on hand to introduce the film.

**MAPLE THEATRE.** 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-9990 for information. (8; \$3.75 twilight show)

"Antonia and Jane" (Britain - 1991). A British comedy about two women — one a cool beauty, the other a lost soul — who spend each year preparing for their annual reunion lunch. Directed by Beeban Kidron.

"Toto Le Heros" (France - 1991). Thomas has convinced himself that 60 years ago he was switched at birth with Alfred, a wealthy supermarket tycoon. He plots to kill his rival, all the while recalling the disappointments of his tragedy-filled life. Depressing and engrossing.

**MICHIGAN THEATRE.** 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8297

for information. (8; \$4 students/eniors)

"La Belle Noiseuse" (France - 1992). Through April 19 (call for showtimes) A lengthy, beautiful account of an artist's step-by-step painting of a beautiful model. Directed by Jacques Rivette and starring Michel Piccoli.

"Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation." Midnight April 16, 9:30 p.m.; midnight April 17 - 18. A wicked collection of some of the sickest cartoon shorts ever created. Along the way, you'll meet such off-color creations as "In-Bred Jed" and "Dog Pile."

"Frank's Drive-In Movie Night - Two films plus intermission clips and trailers compiled by the Michigan's projectionists, Frank Uhle. Starting at 7:30 p.m. April 19. Including "Star Baby" (USA - 1964) is the rarely screened story of a twisted child led by Lon Chaney, Jr., who also sings the title song. Followed by "The Mysterians" (Japan - 1959), an alien story in wide screen from Inshiro Honda, the creator of "Godzilla."

**REDFORD THEATRE.** 17360 Lakeside, Detroit. Call 537-1133 for information. (8; \$5)

"The Robe" (USA - 1953). 8 p.m. April 17 (organ overture at 7:30 p.m.) Richard Burton stars as a Roman soldier charged with overseeing Christ's execution. This first film in CinemaScope also stars Jean Simmons and Victor Mature.

John Monaghan

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Cheese Blintzes with Berry Sauce  
Apple Crepes with Brandy Cinnamon Sauce  
Belgian Waffles and Gourmet Omelettes made to order  
Fresh Pasta made to order, Wild Rice Pilaf  
Scrambled Eggs Provençal, Bacon and Sausage  
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