

'Chocolate' serves up emotional feast

By JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

"Like Water for Chocolate," currently at the Maple, is a sensual Mexican feast set around the early part of this century where tradition stands in the way of true love. Not the newest idea granted, but its spicy and fantastical handling makes it unforgettable.

Tita (Lumi Cavazos) and Pedro (Marco Leonardi) fall madly in love at first sight. But because she is the youngest of three daughters, Tita may never marry. Instead, according to Mexican tradition, she must care for her widowed mother on the family's ranch until the elder woman dies.

Pedro, in what he thinks is a perfectly acceptable solution, marries Tita's sister Rosaura so he can remain near his true love. Mama Elena (Regina Torne), an angel herself when it comes to marital fidelity, warns the young lovers that she recognizes their plan.

The film compares with the

MOVIES

1987 Danish hit "Babettes Feast" because again we have a repressed woman whose strength is channeled through magical meals. During preparation of Rosaura's wedding cake, Tita's tears drop into the batter, causing guests who eat the cake to sink into a deep depression.

Later, as Tita's passion for her brother-in-law grows, her quail in rose petal sauce acts as an aphrodisiac and sends the diners to different parts of the ranch to satisfy their passions. Gertrudis, the middle sister, runs naked into the woods where a soldier gallops by and whisks her away on horseback.

Literary critics call it "magical realism" as it is found in Latin American movies, books and paintings. The spirit of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, author of "Love in the Time of Cholera" and "A Hundred Years of Solitude,"

haunts this bold blend of fantasy and reality.

Adapted by Laura Esquivel from her best-selling novel, this is also unabashedly a woman's movie. While Pedro and Tita's love remains central to the story, it's the relationships of the women that stand out.

Leonardi's Pedro, after all, is a stiff. Tita, who has sacrificed so much, who has all the passion, finally asks him in desperation, "Why didn't you just steal me away from the start?"

While Cavazos' Tita slimmers quietly, Torne's Elena grows more tyrannical as her clutch over the family weakens. When Gertrudis runs away to become a prostitute and Rosaura and Pedro move off the ranch, Elena's mistreatment of Tita nearly drives the girl to madness.

Not all of the ingredients come together in "Like Water for Chocolate." The musical score, though at times lush, is also surprisingly pedestrian.

The narrative device — in which the story is recalled by Tita's great niece who still prepares the family recipes — is obvious and more than a bit trite. It might, however, explain those bizarre moments, since the story has apparently passed down through generations.

Though it doesn't go overboard with color (it uses a palette of deep textured browns), the movie is packed with metaphors and visual symbols. Esquivel and director Alfonso Arau set the movie on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande at a time when revolutionaries, along with Tita, make painful and often deadly breaks from tradition.

If you have a question or comment for John Monaghan, call him at 853-2047, mailbox number 1886, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write him care of Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 33251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48150



Changing: Tommy Chong has found there's still in laughter after parting with Cheech Marin, his partner in the '70s.

Chong: Comedy without Cheech

By BOB SADLER
SPECIAL WRITER

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

While Tommy Chong is no longer half of the successful comedy duo Cheech and Chong, he is still a very funny man.

And yes, drugs admittedly still play a key part in Chong's life — and humor. Counter to any governmental statistics or claims, Chong believes that drugs, particularly marijuana, are more popular now than they were when he and Cheech Marin made a name for themselves with their "Up in Smoke" brand of humor.

"In the '70s, it was just the musicians, the students and the Deadheads," Chong said in a recent interview, alluding to the legions of fanatical Grateful Dead fans. "Garcia and the boys are still the highest-grossing band in the world. Look at their audiences. They're not saying no, that's for sure."

Chong believes that the benefits of smoking marijuana

that produced classic comedy films featuring famous bits like "Santa Claus and His Old Lady" and "Basketball Jones" and hit films like "Up in Smoke," "Things Are Though All Ovs" and "Still Smokin'." Some of the duo's recordings have been recently been reissued on compact disc and remain strong sellers.

"We have to sue to get all the royalties," Chong said with a laugh, "but the albums still sell really well. Our stuff is timeless. The '70s have come right back but I don't see anyone pulling out any Flip Wilson records."

As a result of this '70s revival, Chong now is out on tour about half of every month, playing larger comedy clubs.

Tommy Chong will appear Tuesday at Chaplin's West, 16390 Telegraph Road, Detroit. Call 533-8866 for reservations.

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY
Detroit Public Library, 5201 Woodward Ave., Call 833-4048 for information. (\$25 series membership; \$4 individual admission).
• Double feature — "The Mark of Zorro" (USA — 1940) and "My Favorite Blonde" (USA — 1942) starting at 7 p.m. May 14-15.
Tyronne Power plays the Spanish Robin Hood in this rousing action film co-starring Basil Rathbone and Linda Darnell. Bob Hope stars in "Blonde," a funnier-than-

usual spy comedy featuring Madeline Carroll. Concluding the DFS' 20th anniversary series.

DETROIT THEATRE
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens).
• "Rift-Raft" (Britain — 1991), 7 and 9:30 p.m. May 14-15; 4 and 7 p.m. May 16. British director Ken Loach tells the story of construction workers converting an abandoned hospital into luxury apartments.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY
13670 Michigan Ave., Dearborn.

Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)
• "The Last Mile" (USA — 1932), 7 p.m. May 10. Prison inmates on death row attempt to take-over the cell block and escape in this solid melodrama starring Preston Foster and Howard Phillips.

MAJIC BAO THEATRE CAFE
22818 Woodward, Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$5)
• "Panama Deception" (USA — 1992), 7 and 10 p.m. May 14. Last year's Academy Award winner for best documentary features focuses on foreign policy cover-ups that paint a grim picture of the Reagan/Bush era. Director Barbara Trent will introduce her controversial film and answer audience questions afterwards.

(Mexico — 1992). A lonely woman puts all her energies into creating wonderful meals in this blend of fantasy and drama. As with the Danish hit "Babettes Feast," audiences won't want to see the film on an empty stomach.

"El Mariachi" (Mexico — 1992). Twenty-three-year-old Robert Rodriguez made this film on just \$7,000 in a Mexican border town. The film follows a young musician mistaken for a mobster.

REDFORD THEATRE
118 N. Main, Royal Oak. Call 537-2560 for information. (\$2.50)
• "An American in Paris" (USA — 1951), 8 p.m. May 14-15; 2 p.m. matinee May 15 (organ overture begins a half hour before show time). Gene Kelly plays a artist/gigolo who finds true love with Leslie Caron. Vincente Minnelli directed the MGM musical classic, with unforgettable score by George and Ira Gershwin. Songs include "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" and "Love Is Here to Stay."

Warp Factor Karlos Barney



"First level — hellfire and brimstone. Second level — endless torment. Third level — eating coleslaw from those little paper cups."

MAIN THEATRE
118 N. Main, Royal Oak. Call 542-1080 for show times. (\$5.75)
• "Brother's Keeper" (USA — 1992). Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's fascinating documentary explores the facts behind a bizarre New York murder trial involving four illiterate bachelor brothers. The controversial subject is handled with sensitivity and profound insight as the reclusive farmers enter a community that once shunned but now stands up for them.

MAPLE THEATRE
4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$5.75 evenings; \$2.95 twilight)
• "Like Water for Chocolate"

STAR JOHN R
32289 John R (at 14 Mile), Madison Heights. Call 585-2070 for show times. (\$6 evenings; \$3.75 twilight).
• "Lieutenant" (USA — 1993). Harvey Keitel's lead performance is arguably the best thing about this nasty portrait of a New York detective who indulges in reckless nights of sex, violence and drugs when he falls into debt. Directed by Abel Ferrara ("King of New York").

Covers from page 8A

3-D Invisibles, Strange Boddellows and Tempermill and Soundcamp studios. The group's company expands beyond music, however. They've also worked with Cinderella's Attic, U.A.W. Sam's Jam, Gardner-White Furniture, Beverly Hills Racquet and Health Club and First Optometry Eye Care Centers.

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"There's no end to what we can do," Scanlan said.

Scanlan admits he also hooked up with Griffiths, who has also played in bands, to secure his financial future.

"Playin' in bands is fabulous but I don't see any yachts in my future," he said with a laugh. The Junk Monkeys, signed to Metal Blade records in California, currently have scored a hit with the single "Bliss" from the album of the same name.

Through Scanlan's musical know how, he and Griffiths were able to get a lot of work through word of mouth.

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COMEDY

outweigh the harm and that people now smoke it in the privacy of their own homes and offices to relieve stress.

"There is no reason that it shouldn't be legalized, except political correctness," Chong said. "Pot dealers' biggest customers are lawyers. They're hip. They work hard, and they like to relax. It can make a bad deal great."

Wearing that political correctness on his sleeve is the reason Chong cites for his success in comedy and film. It also led to the break with his former partner — now part of the cast of "Golden Palace," the old "Golden Girls" series as revived by CBS.

"Cheech and I fell out because he wanted to go the straight route," Chong said. "There's no animosity. It was just creative differences. He went a route that I would never go, and I went the route that he was tired of going. That was the end of that."

As a comedy duo, few could rival the success of Cheech and Chong during the '70s and early '80s. It all started when Chong, a native of Edmonton, Alberta, had an improvisational group in Vancouver, working out of his brother's nightclub. Marin saw the group perform. Chong knew Marin was an actor and asked if he would be interested in joining. He did, starting the partnership

AT THE MIKE

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He'll pump you up ... You've seen him on "Saturday Night Live" as the host of "Weekend Update." While he makes an appearance at Pine Knob later this summer, you can catch Kevin Heaton a bit earlier at the Main Street Comedy Showcase in Ann Arbor May 20. Call 996-9080 for reservations.

Don't be stupid ... Get to Mark Fidley's Comedy Castle for Texan Bill Engvall May 20-22. One of the funniest men-touring clubs today, Engvall is probably best known for his observation that stupid people should wear signs — that way we wouldn't ask them anything important. He actually used to sell the signs! Call 542-9900 for reservations.

Least chance live? ... Legend is a ball that is not wasted on Richard Pryor. Now fighting Multiple Sclerosis, Pryor is out on tour to prove the fact that he is not dead, and to earn enough money to avoid bankruptcy. The State Theater on May 29 could be his last live performance in the Detroit area. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster outlets. Call 645-6568.

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