



'Made in America': humorous poke at parenting

Set in Oakland and Berkeley, Calif., Warner Bros. "Made in America" tells the story of Sarah, an independent black woman (Whoopi Goldberg) who conceives a child with the help of a sperm bank.

When her daughter Zora (Nina Long) discovers the truth 18 years later, the whole family is in for a big surprise.

Sarah Mathews wanted to have it all — her own business, her own independence, her own family. The business is going just fine: Sarah owns a thriving African-American bookstore perfectly in keeping with her own proud Afrocentric consciousness.

And when her husband died before they were able to have children, she went to a sperm bank, which resulted in her beautiful daughter, Zora (Nina Long), now a confident young woman about to enroll in college. Sarah thinks she's done pretty well for herself,

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and her family, unusual as it may be.

But now Zora wants to know more about her father, whom she's always been told is the late Mr. Mathews. Zora does a little research at the sperm bank, hoping to meet the intelligent, distinguished black man who helped give her a genetic heritage.

It turns out her father is white. And what's more, he's Hal Jackson (Ted Danson), a good-time guy who's careened through life sleeping backs, shaking hands and making a small fortune selling cars in Oakland.

The one thing he never expects to face is an emotional young black woman insisting he be her dad, whose outrage she then shows up shortly afterward, demanding that he stay out of their lives forever — a demand he's only too happy to honor.

Zora's need to know both her parents begins to draw Hal and

Sarah into an incongruous, though steadily developing friendship.

"Made in America," combines romance, parenthood, contemporary humor and an offbeat look at what "family" really means. It is directed by Richard Benjamin and produced by Arnon Milchan, Michael Douglas and Rick Bieber.

The screenplay is written by Holly Goldberg Sloan, based on a story by Marcia Brandwynne and Nadine Schiff and Holly Goldberg Sloan.

Executive producers Marcia Brandwynne and Nadine Schiff came up with the concept of a child who, after learning she was a product of artificial insemination, sets out to find her father. The two women, who were both working in local news in Los Angeles at the time, sat down to work out the story details.

"I just knew we had the makings of a funny, dynamic romantic comedy," said producer Arnon Milchan. "I loved the idea that



New comedy: From left, Hal (Ted Danson), Zora (Nina Long), Sarah (Whoopi Goldberg) and Tea Cake (Will Smith) celebrate Zora's graduation award in "Made in America."

these two people who get together because sometimes that happens in their own lives."

"Made in America" is rated PG-13 (Parental Guidance Suggested).

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Now showing at these suburban theaters: AMC Americana West, AMC Laurel Park, GCC Canton Cinema, Quo Vadis, Star Rochester, AMC Southfield City, United Artists West River.

FILM CLIPS

'CLIFFHANGER'

Released by TriStar Pictures
Starring: Sylvester Stallone, John Lithgow, Michael Rooker, Ripthor Waite and Janine Turner
Directed by: Renny Harlin
Produced by: Alan Marshall, Henry Harlin
Screenplay by: Michael France and Sylvester Stallone
Rated: R (Restricted: Under 18 requires an accompanying parent or guardian)
Running Time: Two hours
Rating (out of a possible four):

'Cliffhanger': It's exciting but overly violent



Picture the final 10 minutes of "North by Northwest," the Hitchcock classic where Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint elude bad guys atop Mount Rushmore. Now imagine the scene played over and over again, with twists and variations, and you'll have a pretty good idea what "Cliffhanger" is all about.

The edge-of-your-seat action thriller, which debuted May 28, opens high on a Rocky Mountain peak. Gabe, the expert mountain climber played by Sylvester Stallone, grips a fellow climber's hand as she dangles 4,000 feet above sea level. She pleads with him not

to let her fall, but his hold weakens and she plummets to her death.

Eight months later, a still-shaken Gabe climbs the peaks once again when his former partner (Michael Rooker) receives a distress call. What they don't realize is that the senders are actually bloodthirsty treasury thieves who want the climbers to fetch three suitcases full of newly minted currency.

The action that follows, just like the old cliffhanging serials of the 1930s and 1940s, finds the climbers in various nail-biting situations.

They battle a collapsing rope bridge, a bat-filled cave, a snow slide, a slowly fraying rope and the sadism of the killers, led here by an evil John Lithgow.

Though he shares some of the derring-do with the likable Rook-

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er, Stallone still hogs most of the action. In one very Rambo-like moment, he is forced to strip down to his T-shirt before ascending a snow-covered peak. The bad guys call it insurance because they know he'll freeze if he doesn't return to them. We might call it an excuse for Sly to flex outside his plaid parka.

Janine Turner plays pretty much the same role she does in the TV series "Northern Exposure," that of a pilot in the middle of nowhere. She teams with Stallone in the second half when he escapes and tries to head the other party off at the pass.

The real star of the movie is director Renny Harlin, who makes the most out of the stunning mountain vistas (actually filmed

in the Italian Alps). The Finnish-born director of "Die Hard 2" creates another movie that works completely in visual terms. Mute the dialogue, keep the rousing score (reminiscent again of "North by Northwest") and you'd have the most exciting silent movie ever made.

"Cliffhanger's" set-up, after all, could be done in one title card. The rest of the dialogue consists of screaming, swearing and an occasional wry aside by Lithgow — "You kill one man, they call you a murderer. Kill 30,000, they call you conqueror."

The gratuitous violence and profanity should keep families away from "Cliffhanger," a shame because parents and kids could otherwise enjoy it together. Blame Canada, the production company that trashed up so many of Arnold Schwarzenegger's pictures

and supplied most of the money for this one.

Also blame co-scriptwriter Stallone, who reportedly changed the script around plenty during the long shooting schedule. There's really no emotional closure for that magnificent opening scene, causing better-than-usual character conflicts to take a back seat to mindless action.

Nevertheless, this is the first thrill of the summer season, a visual tour-de-force that allows Stallone to grunt, sweat, flex and seek revenge amidst some truly magnificent locales.

Now showing at these suburban theaters: AMC Abbey 8, AMC Laurel Park, Quo Vadis, United Artists West River, AMC Americana West, AMC Southfield City, AMC Wonderland, Star Rochester Hills.

United Artists busy upgrading theaters

The doors of the newly renovated United Artists-Oakland theater, at Oakland Mall (14 Mile and I-76) in Troy, opened May 28.

The refurbished theater features new stereo sound, a fully remodeled and redecorated lobby and auditoriums, multi-station refreshment centers for quicker service and customer convenience, and new seating with cupholder armrests.

This is the first step in a multi-million-dollar program of major renovations to all the United Artists metro Detroit theaters except the United Artists-West River, already state

of the art.

Renovations continue at two other locations and they will resume operations shortly. United Artists-Lakeside will reopen Friday, June 4. United Artists-12 Oaks will reopen Friday, June 24.

This extensive program of renovations reinforces United Artists' long-range commitment to metro Detroit, a spokesman said.

Dallas-based United Artists Theatres operates 33 screens in the Detroit area. With 2,300 screens nationwide, it is the largest theater circuit in the world.

Share your view about new flicks

Movie: "Sliver"
Reaction: Disappointing
Moviegoer: Pam Craig of Livonia

"I was disappointed in how much they changed it from the book," said Pam Craig of Livonia about "Sliver," which is being shown at area movie theaters. "The ending doesn't make sense. They didn't pull it off. I'm sure Ira Levin (who wrote the book on which the movie is based) must be really upset that they took such liberties with his story."

Craig had an opinion about a recently released movie, and we're sure you do, too. Let us know what you think about "Sliver," "Made in America," "Cliffhanger" or any other recently released movie.

If you've seen a new movie lately, either good or bad, we want to hear from you. Call Kelly Wagonik, Entertainment editor, 953-2105, to comment on newly released movies. If you reach her voice mail, leave your comments, name, city and day-time phone number. To fax comments, dial 591-7279. Or write: Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 38251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

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