

GOING TO THE MOVIES



'Joy Luck Club' weaves emotional family tapestry



JOHN MONAGHAN

My wife has intentionally avoided seeing "The Joy Luck Club." She suspects that the subtlety she loved so much in Amy Tan's best-selling novel will be lost under the heavy hand of Hollywood.

She's right. The movie is manipulative and often schmaltzy, trying to milk tears at every turn. Still, as co-scripted by Tan and directed by Wayne Wang, it presents genuine emotion and unforgettable characters.

An ambitious project, "The Joy Luck Club" traces four families over three generations in a complex tapestry of flashbacks within flashbacks. The transplanted Chinese women formed the club in the 1950s, meeting for weekly games of mahjong and gossip.

One of the women has recently died, and her daughter June (Ming-Na Wen) now sits down to the dining room table with the "aunties." Like just about everything in the movie, this has great significance.

"I realized now that they were expecting me to take my mother's place," June reflects, unleashing a flood of memories about her often stormy relationship with her mother.

It appears that June, from a very early age as a reluctant piano pupil, could never please her demanding mother. She's constant-

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ly compared to "cousin" Waverly, the chess-playing prodigy who makes the cover of Life.

In one of the movie's funniest scenes, Waverly's proud mother walks through Chinatown streets with her daughter in one hand and the Life cover very conspicuously tucked against her chest. When the bratty Waverly refuses to compete one day, she and her mother launch a lifelong game of emotional chess where the older woman invariably wins.

In this and the other two families, the mothers can't understand why their daughters, who seemingly have everything, should botch their lives so terribly. Flashbacks reveal turbulent times back in China, where June's mother was forced during wartime to abandon her twin babies by the side of the road.

Ultimately, "The Joy Luck Club" is about hope, with the idea that spirit can be passed down from generation to generation, providing it's there to give. The performances by the mothers are outstanding while some of the daughters, especially Ming-Na Wen's June, come off a bit stiff. In the modern scenes, her portrayal of contentment, gazing out a window with her hands wrapped around a hot mug of coffee, looks like a Maxwell House commercial.

Writer Tan, who also serves as co-producer, had a large hand in bringing her novel to the screen. Despite her best efforts (along



SHANE SATO

Epic drama: "The Joy Luck Club," based on the best-selling novel by Amy Tan, stars (left to right) Kieu Chinh, Ming-Na Wen, Tamlyn Tomita, Tsai Chin, France Nuyen, Lauren Tom, Lisa Lu and Rosalind Rao.

with director Wang and executive producer Oliver Stone), the movie has the mark of Hollywood, in this case Hollywood Pictures.

A feature film production wing of Disney, Hollywood Pictures usually specializes in movie junk food with big-name stars. It compensates for the movie's arty and confusing narrative by presenting it with the visual flatness of television.

Through it all, "The Joy Luck Club" works. During a jam-

packed preview screening at the Maple in Birmingham, you could hear a pin drop in the theater — if it wasn't for all the fluttering tissues and muffled sobs.

The Joy Luck Club is now showing at these suburban movie theaters: AMC Maple, AMC Woods, and AMC Laurel Park.

To leave a message for John Monaghan, dial 933-2047, mailbox number 1866, on a touch-tone phone, fax him a note at 591-7279, or write him in care of Entertainment,

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

What's your opinion of "Joy Luck Club" or any other recently released movie? Call 953-2105, and leave a Voice Mail message. Be sure to tell us your first name and hometown.

FILM CLIPS

"THE JOY LUCK CLUB"

Released by: Hollywood Pictures
Starring: Ming-Na Wen, Kieu Chinh, Tsai Chin, France Nuyen, Lisa Lu, Tamlyn Tomita, Lauren Tom, Rosalind Rao

Directed by: Wayne Wang
Produced by: Wayne Wang, Amy Tan, Ronald Bass and Patrick Markey

Written by: Amy Tan and Ronald Bass, based on the novel by Amy Tan

Rated: R (Restricted. Under 18 requires an accompanying parent or guardian.)

Running time: 2 hours, 25 minutes

Rating (out of a possible four):



Key: Don't miss it (1) (2) (3) (4)

Strongly recommended (1) (2) (3) (4)

Worth a look (1) (2) (3) (4)

Wish for video (1) (2) (3) (4)

Characters escape prisons in thriller, romance



DETROIT MOVIE THEATERS

Action adventure and romance are themes of two movies opening Friday at metro Detroit movie theaters.

In both films prisoners escape their confines and come face-to-face with their enemies. Wesley Snipes, as the diabolical Simon Phoenix, escapes from prison in "Demolition Man," also starring Sylvester Stallone.

Richard Gere is a prisoner to

moods in "Mr. Jones." He falls in

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love with his doctor who helps him, but threatens his sense of freedom.

"Demolition Man" tells the story of LA police Sgt. John Spartan (Sylvester Stallone) and Simon Phoenix (Wesley Snipes). It's 1996 and Phoenix, a psychopathic criminal, is holding 30 hostages in a heavily armed compound. Spartan, known as the "Demolition Man," apprehends Phoenix in a daring attack that

destroys the building. Phoenix then swears that Spartan is responsible for the incineration of the 30 hostages, and Spartan, convicted of involuntary manslaughter, is sentenced to sub-zero "rehabilitation" as a frozen inmate of the California Cryo-Penitentiary.

Fast-forward to the year 2032. San Angeles to a peaceful, more genteel society.

Thawed from his cryogenic state for a mandatory parole hearing, Phoenix escapes from the cryoprisn, and begins a savage

rampage through the city. Spartan is removed from the CryoPrison to once again face his arch-enemy.

Richard Gere, star of "Mr. Jones," is a prisoner to his moods. Intelligent, dedicated, respected — Dr. Libbie Bowen (Lena Olin) is a psychiatrist who is totally unprepared for Mr. Jones. She falls in love with him risking her career for love.

By loving Libbie and allowing her to help him, Mr. Jones risks losing the ecstatic sense of freedom and creativity he cherishes as part of his condition.

More than 200 calls

Dolores Garsell calls the response to her Observer & Eccentric Classified ad "overwhelming" and adds that she was also pleased with the service she received. Join Dolores Garsell and

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A Comedy Inspired by the True Story of the First Jamaican Olympic Bobsled Team.

JAMAICAN BOBSLEDDERS?

Disney's COOL RUNNINGS

AMC ABBEY 8 NOW SHOWING AMC BEL AIR 10 AMC SOUTHWEST CITY 10

AMC EASTLAND 4 AMC OLD ORCHARD 10 AMC SOUTHERN 10

AMC SOUTHWEST 4 AMC SHERING CTR. 10 AMC WOODLAND 10

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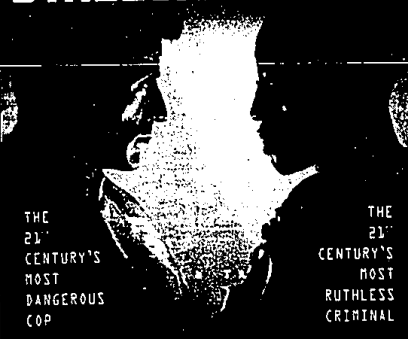
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STALLONE SNIPE



DEMOLITION MAN

THE FUTURE ISN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF THEM

THE 21ST CENTURY'S MOST DANGEROUS COP

THE 21ST CENTURY'S MOST RUTHLESS CRIMINAL

STARTS FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8TH

AMC AMERICANA WEST AMC BEL AIR AMC SOUTHWEST CITY

AMC SOUTHWEST AMC SHERING CTR. AMC WOODLAND

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THE JOY LUCK CLUB

AMC LAUREL PARK AMC MAPLE 3 AMC WOODS 6

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MR. JONES

EVERYTHING THAT MAKES HIM DANGEROUS MAKES HER LOVE HIM

RICHARD GERE LENA OLIN

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