

Capra meets the Coens in Proxy' In Concert from page 6A

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

It's New Year's Eve. Snow drifts by a troubled man perched atop a skyscraper ledge 44 floors high — not counting the mezzanine. How he got there and whether or not he'll jump was a familiar springboard for old Frank Capra movies like "Meet John Doe" or the ubiquitous "It's a Wonderful Life."

Mr. Capra, meet the Coens. Brothers Joel and Ethan, the writer/director team of "Barton Fink" and "Raising Arizona," have breathed new life into the shop-worn premise of "The Hudsucker Proxy," a fictionalized account of the inventor of the Hula Hoop and a visually dazzling tribute to fast-paced comedies of the 1930s.

Tim Robbins plays Norville Barnes, a recent graduate of the Muncie Business School, who lands a job in the mail room of Hudsucker Industries circa 1958. With the death of the company president and controlling interest up for public sale, Hud hunches want a new leader who can bring stock down, so it can be purchased for pennies.

In short, they want an imbecile, and they think they've found one

MOVIES

in Barnes. After all, the earnest Midwesterner walks around with sketches of his new product idea, basically a circle drawn in the middle of a sheet of paper. "You know," he says, shocked that no one else recognizes its brilliance, "for kids."

You know the rest of the story. That invention, the Hula Hoop, becomes a Baby Boom phenomenon, catapults Barnes and Hudsucker to the top, and leaves Board Chairman Sidney J. Musserberger (Paul Newman) fuming, intent on breaking the young prodigy he personally advanced.

Enter Amy Archer (Jennifer Jason Leigh), a Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper gal who becomes Barnes' secretary to get the inside scoop.

The Coens, along with "Evil Dead" director and former *Detective* Sam Raimi, have created a clever little piece of nostalgia, full of wisecracks and overlapping dialogue. And while the emotion of the story gets overpowered by set design and crazy camera angles, it easily ranks as the year's funniest picture.

In one of the movie's several

well-edited sequences, a lone Hula Hoop rolls from an alley down the street and into the path of a little boy. Viewed from above, the shot recalls the apes eyeing that mystical monolith at the opening of "2001: A Space Odyssey."

At this exact moment, an elementary school has let out for the afternoon. As the boy picks the toy up and starts to swing and shake, a pack of screaming school boys and the street corner and stare in amazement at what they see. The Hula Hoop, formerly a bust, officially becomes a craze.

For his part, Robbins plays the role with congeniality and "gee whiz" American enthusiasm. It's a pleasure to see him doing slapstick with Paul Newman, who too rarely gets a chance to let his silver hair down.

Blink and you'll miss cameos by character actors Peter Gallagher (as a slick Italian agent), the late Steve Buscemi (as a henrik coffeehouse server). We could stand to see more of them, along with Bruce Campbell, another former *Detective* and star of TV's "Brisco County," as Smitty, the newspaperman.

As gum-chomping newsman Archer, Jason Leigh does a dead-

on impersonation of Jean Arthur and Rosalind Russell. She's about 20 years out of time, but it hardly matters to the Coen brothers, whose movies read like pages of a 20th century history book thrown up in the air and then hastily reassembled.

Dennis Gassner's set design is a knockout, especially the Decora skyscraper that houses Hudsucker. The mail room, inspired by "Metropolis" and "Brazil," is a nightmare of cables, tubes and feverishly working dummies. The top-floor board room, meanwhile, is an exercise in monumental sparseness — only the heavy-limbed board member and a ticker tape machine backed by the city in silhouette.

Some may see "The Hudsucker Proxy" as a one-joke movie, and indeed it does lose momentum after a while. It's the invention that the Coens bring to virtually every shot that keeps you wanting to see this engagingly oddball comedy.

If you have a comment for John Monaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox 1866, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write to him care of Street Scene, Observer, Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Bedard at Botsford Inn's Blues Barn, 28000 Grand River Ave., (at Eight Mile Road, Farmington Hills, 4822) (313) 459-6669

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MARY MCGUIRE Backseat Saloon, 3064 Orchard Lake Road, Kewego Harbor, (acoustic) (810) 682-1119

THE AFGHAN WHISKEY St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, (alternative rock) (313) 961-MELT

MELISSA FERRICK Brass Coffeehouse, 305 S. Main St., Royal Oak, (acoustic) (810) 399-7200

Friday, April 1 THE HANNIBALS and The Verve Pipe play as part of Three Floors of Fun at the Royal Oak Music Theatre, 318 W. Fourth, Royal Oak, (alt/rap) (810) 546-7610

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BUGS BEDDOW BRIGADE New Place, 22723 Michigan Ave., (three blocks east of Outer Drive), Dearborn. (313) 277-3035

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LARRY MCCRAY Sully's, 4756 Greenfield Road, Dearborn. (313) 846-1920

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THE ALLIGATORS Sign's Dugout, 3350 Auburn Road, Auburn Hills. (810) 652-6433

DETOIT BLUES BAND Spoonheads, 31410 Ford Road, Garden City, (blues) (313) 425-7373

BLUE ROSE Moby Dicks, 5452 Schaefer Road, Dearborn, (blues) (313) 581-3650

BEN MOORE AND THE BLUES EXPRESS Sports — A '50s Bar and Grill, 166 Maple, Wyandotte, (blues) (313) 285-5060

BLUE SUIT Doc Flocks, 7935 W. Maple, West Bloomfield, (blues) (810) 624-7200

PAUL KELLER/CARY COOKER QUARTET Bar of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. (313) 662-8310

Saturday, April 2 DREAM CATCHERS BENEFIT With The Regular Boys and Jeanne Mayle at the Detroit North American Indian Grill, 22700 Plymouth Road (east of Telegraph Road), Detroit. (313) 535-2996

THE VERVE PIPE Plays during "Fourth Street" dance night at the Royal Oak Music Theatre, 318 W. Fourth, Royal Oak, (alt/rap) (810) 546-7610

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SCREEN SCENE

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

DETROIT FILM THEATRE Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call (313) 833-2323 for information. (65)

"Belle Epoque (The Age of Beauty)" (Spain — 1992), 7 and 9:30 p.m. April 1-2; 4 and 7 p.m. April 3. In the spring of 1931, with Spain seemingly on the verge of a national war, a young aristocratic writer tests the limits of a reclusive friend's liberal philosophy by pursuing all four of the old man's beautiful daughters. This clever comedy, nominated for Best Foreign Film Oscar, plays for two weekends.

KINOTEK Capitol Theatre and Arts Centre, 121 University, Windsor, Call (519) 371-5160 for information. (\$4.00)

"Wings of Desire" (Germany/France — 1987), 9 p.m. April 2-4. Wenders' funny and eccentric story of angels who look down on

the people populating Berlin, among them a trapeze artist and Peter Falk (playing himself). "Faraway, So Close," the recent sequel, pales in comparison.

MAGIC BAO THEATER 22919 Woodward, Ferndale. Call (810) 544-3030 for information. (\$14)

"Three Stooges Festival," 8 p.m. March 31. Six uncut shorts (five Curley's and one Shemp) from the classic comedy team. Titles include "Squeakheads of the 'Roos," "The Nazi spoof 'I'll Never Hell Again,'" and the first Stooge vehicle, "Woman Haters," performed completely in rhyme.

MAIN ART THEATER 118 N. Main St. at 11 Mile, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday. Call (810) 542-0180 for information and show times. (\$6.50; \$4 students; \$3 twilight/matinee)

"The Secret of Green Pajama" (Vietnam — 1993). A Cinderella story about a Vietnamese servant girl in 1950s Saigon.

"Schindler's List" (USA — 1993). Steven Spielberg got his

Academy Award for this story of Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), a war profiteer and Nazi crony who saved the lives of more than 1,000 Jews during the Holocaust.

"The Hudsucker Proxy" (USA — 1994). The camera in the star in this wacky account of a business graduate's rise from mail room to president's office in 1958. His invention, the Hula Hoop, becomes a household name. Capra meets surrealism in his latest from Joel and Ethan Coen ("Raising Arizona" and "Barton Fink").

MAPLE THEATER 4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield. Films play through at least Thursday. Call (810) 855-9090 for information. (\$5.75; \$3.95 matinee; \$2.95 twilight)

"Sirens" (Britain — 1994). John Duigan ("Flirting") directs this story of a young Englishwoman's sexual awakening when she visits the eccentric and bohemian household of a controversial painter, Sam Neill, Tara Fitzgerald and Hugh Grant star.

"In the Name of the Father" (Britain — 1993). In this true story, Daniel Day-Lewis plays an Irish

man falsely accused of bombing a pub near London in 1975. The brilliant story of miscarriage of justice is co-written and directed by Jim Sheridan, who met with Day-Lewis on "My Left Foot."

"Schindler's List." See Main Art Theatre listing above.

REDFORD THEATER 17360 Lahver, Detroit. Call (313) 537-1500 for information. (\$2.50)

"The Keys of the Kingdom" (USA — 1944), 8 p.m. April 1; 2 and 8 p.m. April 2 (organ overture begins a half hour before show time). Gregory Peck stars as a missionary in this long, but effective tale that also features Thomas Mitchell, Vincent Price and a young Roddy McDowall.

STATE THEATER 17115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call (313) 961-5480. (\$1)

"Bad Lieutenant" (USA — 1993), 9 p.m. March 28. Harvey Keitel plays a cop who indulges in a number of illegal activities, including drugs, gambling, and illicit sex. Abel Ferrara directs.

'Kalifornia:' A close call with crime

By LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

When faced with true, soulless evil, how would your average bleeding-heart intellectual respond? Would a close encounter with an utterly remorseless killer cause a change in the attitude that criminals need treatment, not incarceration and punishment?

On some levels that's the question posed by the 1993 film "Kalifornia" in which a writer and his girlfriend take along a killer and his girlfriend on a cross country drive. The writer, having spent his advance, needs help with expenses as he and his girlfriend, a photographer, visit the scenes of murders committed by serial killers.

David Duchovny and Michelle Forbes play the trendy leather jacket-clad pair who maybe aren't

VIDEO

as sophisticated and worldly as they might like to have. Duchovny's character in particular is fascinated and attracted by the sordid and twisted tales of mass murderers.

"You can't let stereotypes get in the way," he says after meeting their new travel companions.

There is a jarring contrast with the other couple, played as the white trash personified by Brad Pitt and Juliette Lewis in the most memorable performances in the film. Pitt's greasy-haired and unkempt Early Grayce murders without a minute of remorse then makes a gift of a dead girl's shoes to the rather dimwitted Adele.

Early and Adele live in a rundown trailer, certainly not a run-

able home, in the middle of what appears to be a junkyard. Early, who is already on parole, can't hold a job, telling his parole officer that they didn't treat him right.

Faced with jail, Early decides it's time for him to relocate with Adele. He tells Adele people think quicker in California because of the heat and by low each month's rent is free.

Duchovny's Brian is the smug sort who sees himself as superior to the harmless but primitive Early. In the end, the writer doesn't have a clue who he is really dealing with in Early.

Forbes' photographer warms up to the hapless Adele and tries to help her. It's her suspicions of Early that spark the upclose violence that was surely inevitable anyway.

In one scene, the violent Early perfectly mucks the writer's answer psychologist questions about how he feels when assaulting someone. The two even do a little shooting together.

Lewis' Adele, barely surviving on her meager wits and self-delusions, is the truly tragic figure of the quartet.

One of the things you might question about "Kalifornia" is whether the writer learned anything from his brush with terror. By the end of the journey that's not totally clear.

"Kalifornia" is available on tape at local video stores. If you have a question or comment, call Leanne Rogers at (313) 953-2103 or write her at The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

character who's out there and who's got a beef with the world and he's the wrong guy to mess with, and some comball, runs afoul of him and doesn't understand who he's dealing with — something like that, but it's funny, too."

"It's not the easiest way to get for making money in the music business," said Gross of the band's diversity.

"We've never tried to think of a hit, or thought of what we can do to be famous. It's always just being real truthful with this music and having faith in that. That's why we do it."

The Howling Diablos play Sierra Station, 15110 Mack, Grosse Pointe Park, Saturday, April 23. Call (313) 822-1270 for more information. They will also perform at the Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw, Pontiac, Saturday, May 14. Call (810) 334-7411 for more information.



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