

There may be more to his preoccupation

STREET SCENE



BARBARA SCHIFF

Voice Mail Message: Barbara Schiff: My 6-year-old son has a thing about Santa Claus. He talks about him and what he will bring for Christmas all the time. Should I be worried about this? My son never stopped talking about Santa after last Christmas up to the present time. When do you think children should stop believing in Santa Claus? Do you think there is something wrong with my son?

Dear Caller,

You ask three questions: Should I worry about my son; when should children stop believing in Santa Claus, and is something wrong with my son? The second question is the easiest to answer. It is appropriate to believe in Santa until about age 8. The answers to the other questions are more complicated.

Is it understandable that you are worried. When a child is preoccupied, it is natural for a parent to worry about it. The thing for you to do is to find out more about the meaning behind your son's extreme attention to Santa. Engage him in conversation about what Santa means to him. There are any number of possibilities of meanings this myth might have for him. Let me give you two examples:

It is possible that your son is fantasizing. He may be focused on Santa in the same way one might carry a rabbit's foot. One of the things that the Santa myth teaches is that there is someone watching over us who is both good and powerful. Your son may be focusing on that aspect because it calms him. It makes him believe the world is a safe place.

Another possibility is that your son is worried about getting presents. Perhaps he thinks others received more presents than he did last year, and he is figuring out a way to get more next year.

In general, educators think that fantasies are essential to a child's development. Children need heroic, mythical figures to inspire them. For example, Santa Claus helps to teach generosity.

Kids who have active fantasy lives are often creative problem solvers when they are adults. The fantasy of Santa Claus would be very positive without the preoccupation.

I hope you will share what you learn from your son with our readers. It will be a learning experience for all of us.

Barbara

If you have a question or a comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Scene, Observer & Eclectic Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, 48164. You can also leave a message by calling 953-2047, mail box 1877, on a touch-tone phone.

Elliott's 'Priscilla' only seldom drags

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Priscilla is the lavender-colored, Greyhound-sized bus that transports a trio of female impersonators to their latest gig. The desert is the seemingly endless expanse that leads from Sydney to their final destination: a resort in the dead center of Australia.

Not surprisingly, the bus breaks down, forcing them to rehearse their act, elaborate lip-synched songs by Donna Summer and Abba, at rough-and-tumble outdoor pubs. Audience members sober enough to realize what's happening either want to fall asleep or beat them up.

Because of this, "The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert," starting this week at the Maple Theatre, could have been a one-joke movie. Fortunately, it's livened up by credible performances, wickedly caty humor and musical numbers so campy even Busby Berkeley wouldn't own up to them.

MOVIES

Respected British actor Terence Stamp plays Bernadette, oldest of the trio, aged into the cross-country tour after the death of a significant other. A truly class act, he was once a leading member of a pioneering drag group, longer ago than he cares to remember.

Mitzi (Hugo Weaving), organizer of the group, has failed to tell the others that he was once married, in fact, still is. It's for the wife, who manages the Alice Springs resort and whom he hasn't seen for more than five years, that he makes the journey.

Once he finds out, the snotty Felicia (Guy Pearce) doesn't let up on the embarrassing personal questions. At least it provides a break for Bernadette, who is constantly badgered about his age. Felicia goes for reactions and on the confines of the bus, it's too difficult.

The jokes in "Priscilla" range from subtle asides to silly sight gags. And while the movie stays lighthearted, the world of homophobia does sink in. Felicia is punned on, successfully picking up a local. Other realists, who seemed bored by their performance, spray paint an AIDS-related obscenity on the bus.

After performing for what seems like the whole of the Australian outback (including a group of Aborigines who like them quite fine), the boys finally arrive at the resort. Until now, we've only had a peek at their feather-and-rhinestone-edged costumes, which, along with makeup kits, take up at least half the bus space.

Writer/director Stephan Elliott knows that part of the fun of Hollywood musicals is watching impossible costume changes on stage. He goes nuts in the climactic number, an enjoyably tacky

take on garish Warner Brothers musicals.

The cast and crew on "Priscilla" made essentially the same voyage as the characters, camping out in remote areas during the 1,800-mile trip. The apparent camaraderie and improvisational spirit has paid off in an enjoyably offbeat, if slight, comedy import.

Consider this just a taste of gender-bending at the movies: In September, the documentaries "The Queen" and "Split" play the Detroit Film Theatre's new Monday series. Tim Burton's "Ed Wood," about the 1960s most famous cross-dressing director, arrives in October. Dress appropriately.

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 & Eclectic Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

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) 853-2323 for information. (65)

"The Blue Kite" (China — 1993), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Aug. 26-27; 4 and 7 p.m. Aug. 28. Band at the beach, a tale of a family torn apart by the turmoil of the 1950s and '60s China.

"High Lonesome: The Story of Bluegrass Music" (USA — 1993), 7 p.m. Aug. 22. According to the filmmaker Rachel Lieblich, you don't need to love bluegrass to enjoy her spirited documentary.

HART PLAZA PYRAMID THEATRE

Downtown Detroit near the riverfront. Outdoor screenings of black-related films begin at dusk, following live music at 8 p.m. Call (313) 224-1194 for more information. (Free)

"La Negro Angustias" (South Africa — 1988), at dusk, Aug. 25. A rarely seen film that tells the story of a black woman who served in Pancho Villa's revolutionary army.

MAIN ART THEATRE

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

"Grief" (USA — 1994), through Aug. 25. This sensitive look at the relationship between straight and gay men and women is set behind the scenes at a sleazy daytime TV series. It centers on a talented young writer coping with the loss of a lover to AIDS.

REDFORD THEATRE
17360 Lahser, Detroit. Call (313) 532-2560 for information. (\$3.50)

STREET SCENE
With John Michael Montgomery and John Ensign at the Palace of Auburn Hills, 4-7 and 7-9 p.m. Aug. 21-22. (country)

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"Spanking the Monkey" (USA — 1994). When a college student is forced to care for his sick mother over summer vacation, he ends up sleeping with her. The offbeat first film by David O. Russell goes beyond its Oedipal story for a portrait of life back home after you've had a taste of the world.

MAPLE THEATRE
4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. All times play through at least next Thursday. Call (810) 855-9090 for information. (\$6; \$2.95 twilight)

"Eat Drink Man Woman" (USA/Thailand — 1994). A comedy from the director of "The Wedding Banquet," about food, a famous chef mysteriously loses his sense of taste, but with three daughters, that's the least of his troubles.

MICHIGAN THEATRE
603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call (313) 658-8397 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"That's Entertainment III" (USA — 1994). Aug. 19-25 (call for show times). Yet another compilation of famous MGM musical numbers and recent interviews. Cyd Charisse, Lena Horne, June Allyson, Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds and Mickey Rooney provide often insightful recollections.

"Eat Drink Man Woman" (USA/Thailand — 1994). Aug. 26-31. (See Maple Theatre listing.)

"Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" (USA — 1971), 4:20 p.m. Aug. 27; 3:20 p.m. Aug. 28. Gene Wilder takes kids on a guided tour in this delightfully perverse children's fantasy script by Roald Dahl.

REDFORD THEATRE
17360 Lahser, Detroit. Call (313) 532-2560 for information. (\$3.50)

Finney's

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door prices and give-aways. In celebration of the anniversary, a few area musicians reflected on their gigs at the Woodward Avenue pub.

Alex Porbe, whose now-defunct funk/rock band Tick Weasel became a Finney's favorite, was always drawn to the club's "intimate setting." The room where the bands play is so small that many patrons sit Indian-style on the floor up against the stage.

"The people are there down to earth," said Porbe who now works as an industrial artist. "It's kind of a casual atmosphere because it's such a small and intimate setting. There's always the drawback because it's too loud for such a small room, at least in the bands I've played in. It would be nice if it was bigger, but that's the charm to it."

Rich Thompson, lead singer for the alternative rock band Fiction, agreed.

"It's kind of quaint; it's small and everything's up close and personal. There's a history of bands that have come and gone written all over the wall next to the stage. It's neat that it has a history," he said.

Finney's is in a not-so-great neighborhood near Detroit's cultural center. It's had an average number of bad incidents, but many of them had a silver lining. The heavy alternative rock band Transparent Red met a die-hard fan in the alley behind the club while police were responding rather aggressively to a tripped

burglar alarm. "All these cops showed up and jumped out of their cars. They had their doors open, their guns drawn and their windows down. We were watching that when this little skinny homeless guy starts going, 'I know you. You're bad,'" Brown said.

The man had boosted a band member to the top of the PA system during a previous Transparent Red show at the State Theatre in Detroit.

"He totally remembered us." While Finney's was responsible for launching the careers of many bands, it ended a few as well. The east-side band The Jamersons called it quits after having a less-than-desired turnout for its show. (The other band on the bill didn't even show up.)

"The last show we did went so poorly that we decided we had to break up because it happened at the very beacon of punk rock in Detroit," said Steve Kaminski, a former Jamerson who plays bass for The Freddy Green.

That, however, "Tick Weasel's Porbe said, is a positive part of Detroit's music scene."

"Sue Summers is doing something really good for Detroit with Finney's," he said.

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Compliments of Observer & Eclectic

All entries must be received by Friday, August 26 to be eligible to win. Employees of O & E, Tolstoye Pictures and K&A Advertising are not eligible to win.

In concert

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(313) 682-8194

Friday, Aug. 26

BLUES NIGHT
With John Michael Montgomery and John Ensign at the Palace of Auburn Hills, 4-7 and 7-9 p.m. Aug. 21-22. (country)

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Men, if you're about to turn 18, it's time to register with Selective Service at any U.S. Post Office.

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