MOVIES

'I'll Be Home for Christmas' offers some fun

By Jon Katz
Special Writer

For your holiday planning convenience, let's eliminate those of you who won't care if Jonathan Taylor Thomas makes it home for Christmas.

Teenage girls will likely pass, having decided that the middle son from TV's "Home Improvement" has peaked as an idol. Likewise adolescent boys, who don't know what the girls saw in him in the first place. Most adults won't buy Thomas as a college student – not while his voice is still changing.

So who does that leave? Only kids who can't read this anyway, and their grandmothers. But there are lots of kids and grandmas who'll want to see-not rent-a family film, and there is enough in this reverse "Home Alone" plot to make it a "could-see," if not a "must-see."

Instead of an eight-year-old being left home alone to battle burglars on Christmas Eve, Thomas is a wiseguy freshman at a West Coast school who's left alone in the desert to battle a three-day deadline: he must make it home to suburban New York for Christmas Eve dinner.

Is he that homesick? Not hardly. In fact, he cashed in his airplane ticket to rent a condo in Cabo San Lucas for him and his too-trusting girlfriend Allie (Jessica Biel). But dad (Gary Cole of "The Brady Bunch" movies) wants son Jake home so badly that he promises him the keys to the vintage 1957 Porsche they rebuilt together if the deadline is met.

To which we ask: why? Jake is a first-class heel, the school's scam artist who sells fake IDs and test answers to dumb jocks. The girlfriend's got it right when she tells him, "you don't have one decent chromosome in your DNA." But every few minutes they cut back to his family moping around the Christmas tree in hopes that son Jake soon will be there.

Meanwhile Jake, as noted, has been stranded in the southern California desert in a glued-on Santa suit, the object of revenge by the jocks after one of his schemes was sabotaged by rival, Eddie (Adam LaVorgna). In the ensuing cross-country trek, Jake meets up with all manner of weirdoes, from a car-full of elderly Vegas-bound Tom Jones fanatics (including the wonderfully-cranky Kathleen Freeman, who's been doing this forever) to a Sad Sack singing cop. All the while, Allie and Eddie are heading east also, barely a step ahead in his Pathfinder, and their ride together suggests that he-Eddie-is a much better match for Allie than out-for-himself Jake.

Thomas has obviously learned much by hanging around Tim Allen, but attempting to copy Allen's style of off-hand quips is like a kid trying on dad's pants when they're still too big. Macauley Caulkin carried "Home Alone" in large part because the character was written so well. Jake's conversion from rat to loving son and boyfriend is far out even for Disney, and Thomas is in over his head as the male lead.

That said, the youngest moviegoers will still find some fun *stuff here, from trained buzzards* to a 5k run with hundreds of Santas to a Christmas parade finale.

ALAN MARKFIELD/DISNEY ENTERPRISES, INC.

In a hurry: *Jake Wilkinson (Jonathan Taylor Thomas) journeys across the country in a Santa Claus suit in "I'll Be Home for Christmas."*

OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

National Amusements Showcase Cinemas

Showcase Auburn Hills 1-14
2150 N. Opdyke Rd.
Between University & Walton Blvd
810-373-2660
Bargain Matinees Daily
All Shows until 6 pm
Continuous Shows Daily
Late Shows Wed Thurs. Fri. Sat.

I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (PG)
I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R)
MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
SIEGE (R)
WATERBOY (PB13)
WIZARD OF OZ (G)
BELLY (R)
VAMPIRES (R)
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)
RUSH HOUR (PG13)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Showcase Dearborn 1-8
Michigan & Telegraph
313-561-3449
Bargain Matinees Daily
All Shows until 6 pm.
Continuous Shows Daily
* Late Shows Fri. & Sat. & Sun.

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOUDID LAST SUMMER (R)
MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
WATERBOY (PG13)
WIZARD OF OZ (G)
BELLY (R)
VAMPIRES (R)
RUSH HOUR (PG13))

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Showcase Pontiac 1-5
Telegraph-Sq. Lake Rd. W Side of Telegraph
810-332-0241
Bargain Matinees Daily
* All Shows Until 6 pm
Continuous Shows Daily *

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R)
SIEGE (R)
BELLY (R)
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Showcase Pontiac 6-12
2405 Telegraph Rd. East side of Telegraph
810-334-6777
Bargain Matinees Daily
* All Shows Until 6 pm
Continuous Shows Daily
Late Shows Fri. & Sat.

I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (PG)
MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
WATERBOY (PG13)
WIZARD OF OZ (G)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)

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The World's Best Theatres
Bargain Matinees Daily $4.00 All Shows Starting before 6:00 pm
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Star John R
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32283 John R. Road
810-585-2070

No one under 6 admitted for PG13 & R rated films after 6 pm

NP SIEGE (R)
NP WATERBOY (PG13)
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)
APT PUPIL (R)
THE MIGHTY (PG13)
BELOVED (R)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)
WHAT DREAMS MAY COME (PG13)
URBAN LEGEND (R)
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY (R)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Star Rochester Hills
200 Barclay Circle
853-2260
No one under age 6 admitted for PG13 & R rated films after 6 pm

NP MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
NP I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R)
NP THE WATERBOY (PG13)
NP LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
NP THE SIEGE (R)
NP PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Star Southfield
12 Mile between Telegraph and Northwestern, OE1-696
248-353-STAR
No one under age 6 admitted for PG13 & R rated films after 6 pm

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R)
NP MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
NP I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (PG)
NP WATERBOY (PG13)
NP THE SIEGE (R)
NP WIZARD OF OZ (G)
NP LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
NP JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R)
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)
BELOVED (R)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)
RUSH HOUR (PG13)

VAMPIRES (R)
GHOST OF DICKENS (G)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
BRIDE OF CHUCKY (R)
NIGHT AT THE ROXBURY (PG13)

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Showcase Westland 1-8
6500 Wayne Rd.,
One blk S. of Warren Rd.
313-729-1060
Bargain Matinees Daily
All Shows Until 6 pm
Continuous Shows Daily
Late Shows Wed.Thurs. Fri. & Sat.

MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
WATERBOY (PG13)
WIZARD OF OZ (G)
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)
RUSH HOUR (PG13)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Star Winchester
1136 S. Rochester Rd, Winchester Mall
248-656-1160
No one under age 6 admitted for PG13 & R rated films after 6 pm

NP I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (PG)
NP THE WIZARD OF OZ (G)
WHAT DREAMS MAY COME (PG13)
JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R)
RUSH HOUR (PG13)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)
BELOVED (R)
SOLDIER (R)
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY (R)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

United Artists Theatres
Bargain Matinees Daily, for all shows starting before 6:00 PM
Same day advance tickets available.
NV - No VIP. tickets accepted

United Artist Oakland
Inside Oakland Mall
248-988-0706

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R) NV
BELLY (R) NV
RUSH HOUR (PG13)
SIMON BIRCH (PG)

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United Artists 12 Oaks
Inside Twelve Oaks Mall
248-349-4311

THE WATERBOY (PG13) NV
THE SIEGE (R) NV
LIVING OUT LOUD (R) NV
ANTZ (PG)
RUSH HOUR (PG13)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

United Artists West River
9 Mile,
2 Block West of Middlebelt
248-788-6572

MEET JOE BLACK (PG13) NV
I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R) NV
THE WATERBOY (PG13) NV
WIZARD OF OZ (G) NV
THE SIEGE (R) NV
JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R)NV
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13) NV
ANTZ (PG) NV
RUSH HOUR (PG13) NV

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United Artists Commerce Township 14
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Just North of the intersection of
14 Mile & Haggerty Rd.
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MEET JOE BLACK (PG13) NV
I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R) NV
I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (PG) LNV
THE WATERBOY (PG13) NV
THE SIEGE (R) NV
THE WIZARD OF OZ (G)
LIVING OUT LOUD (R) NV

JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R) NV
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13) NV
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
ANTZ (PG) NV

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

Birmingham Theatre
211 S. Woodward
Downtown Birmingham
248-644-3419
NP Denotes No Pass Engagements

Order Movie tickets by phone! Call 644-3419 and have your VISA or Master Card ready! (A 75¢ surcharge will apply to all telephone sales)

NP MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
PLEASANTVILLE (PG13)
NP THE WATERBOY (PG13)
NP THE WIZARD OF OZ (G)
NP LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
NP JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)

CALL FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS AND TIMES

MJR THEATRES

$1.00 Ford Tel $1.50
313-561-7200
$1.00 til 6 pm
After 6 pm $1.50
Ample Parking - Telford Center
Free Refill on Drinks & Popcorn
Please Call Theatre for Showtimes

RONIN (R)
MASK OF ZORRO (PG13)
AIRBUD GOLDEN RECEIVER (G)

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Waterford Cinema II
7501 Highland Rd.
S.E. corner M-59 & WSams Lake Rd.
24 Hour Movie Line
(248) 666-7900
CALL 77 FILMS #551
Stadium Seating and Digital sound Makes for the Best Movie Experience in Oakland County
$3.25 (TWI LITE) SHOWS DAILY

NP I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (R)
NP I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (PG)
NP MEET JOE BLACK (PG13)
NP THE WATERBOY (PG13)
NP THE WIZARD OF OZ (G)
NP THE SIEGE (R)
NP LIVING OUT LOUD (R)
NP JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES (R)
PLEASANTVILLE (LR)
APT PUPIL (R)
BRIDE OF CHUCKY (R)
PRACTICAL MAGIC (PG13)
ANTZ (PG)
RUSH HOUR (PG13)

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30400 Plymouth Rd.
313-261-3330

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Main - 11 Mile
Royal Oak
(248) 542-0180
$3.00 (TWI-LITE) SHOWS DAILY

HAPPINESS (NC17)
VELVET GOLDMINE (R)
AMERICAN HISTORY X (R)

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Children Under 6 Not Admitted

Maple Art Cinema III
4153 W. Maple, West of Telegraph
Bloomfield Hills
248-855-9090
DISCOUNTED SHOWS!!

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL (PG13)
CITIZEN KANE (NR)
THE IMPOSTERS (R)

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Oxford 3 Cinemas, L.L.C.
Downtown Oxford
Lower Rd. (M-24)
(248) 628-7100
Fax (248) 628-1300
DETROIT'S LOWEST FIRST RUN PRICES INCLUDING TWILIGHT PRICING $3.00 4-5 PM.

WATERBOY (PG13)
MEET JOE BLACK (PG 13)
APT PUPIL (R)
BELOVED (R)

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AMC Livonia 20
Haggerty & 7 Mile
734-542-9909

CALL THEATRE FOR FEATURES AND TIMES

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Scheduled to open Friday, Nov. 20

"ISLAND IN THE SON"
Film starring Harry Belafonte, Dorothy Dandridge, James Mason, Joan Fontaine and Joan Collins to be shown 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 20 at the Southfield Centre for the Arts, 24350 Southfield Road. Part of the Cultural Arts Division of the Southfield Parks and Recreation Dept. Classic Cinema Series. Tickets $3 and include light refreshments. Call (248) 424-9022 for tickets.

"THE CRUISE"
Exclusively at the Maple Art Theatre. Bennett Miller's homemade, video-lensed documentary chronicles the life and times of an eccentric New York City tour guide.

"ELIZABETH"
Exclusively at the Main Art Theatre. Historical drama that chronicles how a young queen overcame internal conspiracy, assassination attempts and foreign opposition to emerge as one of Europe's most powerful monarchs during the 16th century. Stars Cate Blanchette, Geoffrey Rush, Joseph Fiennes, Richard Attenborough.

"ENEMY OF THE STATE"
Action drama from producer Jerry Brockheimer about how a chance encounter with an old friend destroys one attorney's life when he is framed for murder. Stars Will Smith, Gene Hackman, Jan Voight, Scott Caan, Regina King.

"CELEBRITY"
A comedy written and directed by Woody Allen set in New York with all-star cast including Kenneth Branagh, Judy Davis, Leonardo DiCaprio, Melanie Griffith,Winona Ryder.

"THE RUGRATS MOVIE"
Full-length animated feature based on the popular Nickelodeon series.

Scheduled to open Wednesday, Nov. 25

"HOME FRIES"
An offbeat comedy about two brothers obsessed with the same woman, one wants to marry her, the other to kill her. The trio's lives intertwine in unexpected ways that are orchestrated by the brothers' highly eccentric mother. Stars Drew Barrymore, Catherine O'Hara.

"THE LAST EMPEROR"
Bernardo Bertolucci's director's cut of the Academy Award-winning drama based on the life of Pu Yi, the child who was the last emperor of China.

"A BUG'S LIFE"
Computer-animated comedy centering around a misfit ant as he tries to save his colony from a greedy gang of grasshoppers.

"VERY BAD THINGS"
Savage comedy about five men who turn on each other after a bachelor party goes horribly wrong. Stars Christian Slater, Cameron Diaz.

"BABE: PIG IN THE CITY"
The sequel to the 1995 hit as Babe travels to an overseas state fair to demonstrate his sheepherding abilities.

"JERRY SPRINGMASTER: RINGMASTER"
Comedy about a woman who suspects foul play between her husband and daughter, and their venture onto a famous TV talk show. Stars Jerry Springer.

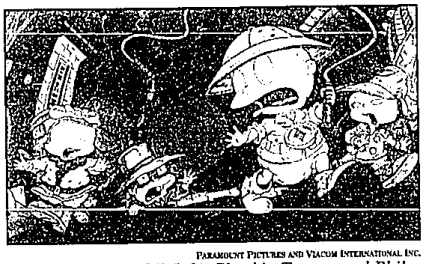
Scheduled to open Friday, Dec. 11

"WAKING NED DEVINE"
A comedy fable about the true meaning of fortune. Someone in a small Irish town wins a lottery and the towns people want to share.

Scheduled to open Friday, Dec. 18

"JACK FROST"
Fantasy adventure about a man who becomes a real father after returning to life as a cooler guy than he'd ever imagined possible – below freezing to be precise. Stars Michael Keaton.

"YOU'VE GOT MAIL"
A romantic comedy about two book store owners, rivals who accidentally fall in love in cyberspace with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.



PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND VIACOM INTERNATIONAL INC.

Animated feature: *Lil (left), Chuckie, Tommy and Phil star in "The Rugrats Movie."*

Medeski, Martin and Wood perform on Backstage Pass

BACKSTAGE PASS

ANN DELISI

Hello again! It is time for another preview of Backstage Pass on Detroit Public Television. This is a must-see show that you are definitely not going to want to miss, so either use your VCRs or remember to tune in.

On this week's show we have a trio of musicians that can appeal to just about any age group and a legendary trumpet artist who was one of the first to ever introduce jazz and funk together. Also a behind the scenes look at the 27 Detroit area kids that will be performing with the Harlem Nutcracker Troupe as well as the ghost from Christmas future will stop by to give us all a show from "A Christmas Carol."

Medeski, Martin and Wood, three names that can pretty much stop traffic in the world of jazz, and we have them on the show. The tight knit group hailing from New York has often been called more funk than jazz, but either way there is not a soul debating that these guys are getting international praise for their music. Medeski, Martin and Wood, more often referred to as MMW, have created their newest record, "Combustication," and so far it has received rave reviews from critics.

In the group's bio Martin says that the key to MMW's success is band chemistry. "We admire each other. It's like a family. We're here to play music, but we're also friends. All of our compositions are collaborations that we spontaneously develop on the road or in the studio. Everyone contributes and everyone balances each other out. But what's really important is that we feel comfortable trying new things together. Medeski added, "That's right. We could settle for just being a grooving organ trio. But that would be too easy. We not only like the challenge, but we're seeking new ways to express ourselves."

Backstage Pass' music producer Ron Pangborn offered, "The jazz organ trio of Medeski, Martin and Wood has something curious about them, and that is the fact that they can appeal to a much younger generation. Those that can appreciate the Grateful Dead and the Dave Matthews Band can also appreciate MMW. These guys are on a major electric tour with a DJ, but for their Backstage Pass show they are going to so an acoustic show for us. They are really excited about that because they can really get into this especially since they haven't had many chances to do that on this tour."

Also stopping by to do a live studio performance is Donald Byrd. Donald is a Detroit jazz legend and he is going to debut "A Voyage of Discovery, The Collection of Donald Byrd" at the Focus: Hope Gallery. This will be the first time Donald will display his extensive personal collection of African American and African art for the public to view.

Ron Pangborn has set up an awesome ensemble to accompany Byrd in our studio. "We have a great group to back up Donald. Teddy Harris is going to be on the piano, Marian Hayden on bass and drummer George Davison."

This week's show is just going to blow the roof off any house that is tuned into Detroit Public Television. You can catch this week's show Sunday at 7:30, Thursday at 5:30 and once more Friday at midnight.