MOVIES

Surround-sound: *John Cusack stars in "High Fidelity," a Touchstone Pictures Release.*

'High Fidelity' turns up the volume on laughter

By Bob Thomas
Associated Press Writer

■ Along with wall-to-wall (John) Cusack, the movie has wall-to-wall music, all of it vintage pop. The credits list 61 recorded numbers, which must be a milestone for movie soundtracks, even in this era of oldie-but-goodie overkill.

Los Angeles (AP) – John Cusack is one of the most talented and versatile actors in films today, brilliant in drama ("Cradle Will Rock") and comedy ("Being John Malkovich"). Judging from his latest film, "High Fidelity," he's also not lacking in chutzpah.

Cusack co-wrote and co-produced the picture, and he appears in almost every frame. Furthermore, he spends a large percentage of the running time looking into the camera and spilling his innermost thoughts.

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But at least there's a reason for "High Fidelity's" hit parade: As the title suggests, music is the film's underlying theme. Cusack operates a Chicago store that sells only vinyl records – that's how much of a purist he is. He is assisted by two equally devoted collectors, Jack Black as a rotund fellow who is bombastic in his musical prejudices, and Todd Louiso as a timid soul who is equally firm in his opinions.

Since few customers arrive to disturb them, the trio spends most of their time discussing esoteric matters of pop-music history. They are hooked on top-five lists, which they compile periodically.

Cusack is working on a top-*five list of another kind, too.* After his live-in girlfriend (Iben Hjejle) walks out on him, he frets about his history of failed relationships. He makes a list of the top five girlfriends who have dumped him. And he vows to seek them out and discover how he failed. Meanwhile he has a fling with a well-known singer (Lisa Bonet).

"High Fidelity" resembles early Woody Allen works in which he agonized over his romances, often relating his failings directly to the audience. Another similarity: the use of oldtime records (though Allen's taste leans more toward middle-of-the-road classics).

The screenplay, based on a novel by Nick Hornby, is the work of D.V. DeVincentis, Steve Pink and Scott Rosenberg, all of whom are also listed among the movie's eight producers. The film betrays evidence of too many cooks. Continuity suffers as Cusack encounters the five for*mer lovers in real time as well as* in flashbacks.

Stephen Frears – director of "Dangerous Liaisons," "The Grifters" and "My Beautiful Laundrette" – seems on unsteady ground converting an essentially British story (the novel was set in London) to the American idiom. The characters are thinly drawn, and Black is especially obnoxious, redeeming himself as a talented blues shouter at the end.

Danish actress Hjejle makes an impressive American debut as Cusack's once and future girlfriend, and real-life sister Joan Cusack adds zest as his sternest critic. Tim Robbins appears briefly in a geekish role that doesn't quite pay off.

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

Scheduled to open Friday, April 14

KEEPING THE FAITH

Ed Norton directed and stars in this romantic comedy about two men who fall for the same woman. The twist is that one man is a Catholic priest and the other an Orthodox rabbi. Also stars Ben Stiller, Jenna Elfman and Anne Bancroft.

AMERICAN PSYCHO

Chilling tale, based on a Brad Easton Ellis novel, of a Wall Streeter who goes on a rage-fueled killing spree. Stars Christian Bale, William DeFoe, Jared Leto, Reese Witherspoon and Samantha Mathis.

MIFUNE

Entertaining film about a newlywed businessman who leaves his bride to make an emergency trip to the family home. What he finds leads to an awareness of life's possibilities which include an over-protective call girl and UFO's. Made in Denmark this 1999 film is shown exclusively Friday-Sunday, April 14-16 at the Detroit Film Theatre.

SPARTACUS

Epic story of the clash between the Romans and a revolt lead by slaves. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Stars Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Jean Simmons, Tony Curtis and Peter Ustinov. Exclusively at The Historic Redford Theatre Friday-Saturday, April 14-15.

TITUS

At the Landmark Maple Art Theatre, this take on Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus" has a surreal, time-bending fusion of costumes and settings from many eras. Written and directed by Julie Taymore, it stars Anthony Hopkins, Jessica Lange, Alan Cumming, and Jonathan Rhys Myers.

WHERE THE MONEY IS

A master criminal fakes a stroke and is transferred from jail to a nursing home, but he meets a nurse who won't make his life any easier. Stars Paul Newman and Linda Fiorentino.

THE HURRICANE

Playing Tuesday-Wednesday April 18-19, Showcase Cinemas Ann Arbor open-captioned for deaf audiences.

WINGS

The Baldwin Theatre in Royal Oak presents this silent film starring Clara Bow, Saturday-Sunday, April 15-16. John Lauter will be the organist. Call (248) 541-6430 for showtimes

Scheduled to open Friday, April 21

JOE GOULD'S SECRET

Director Stanley Tucci stars with Ian Holm in this true story of a "New Yorker" writer and the eccentric bohemian he turns into as a minor celebrity in the 1940s.

GOSSIP

Suspense drama about a group of college students who innocently begin class by planting a rumor that escalates out of control, leading to a web of sexual betrayal and revenge. Stars Norman Reedus, James Marsden, Lena Heady, Kate Hudson, Edward James Olmos, Sharon Lawrence, Eric Bogosian and Joshua Jackson. Directed by Davis Guggenheim.

Scheduled to open Friday, April 28

DETERRENCE

Provocative political thriller set in the year 2008 stars Kevin Pollack as the embattled incumbent president of the United States. Trapped in Colorado by a freak snowstorm, an international incident occurs and the president must act quickly and threatens nuclear confrontation in a live worldwide broadcast.

EAST IS EAST

A comedy about a house full of teenagers who decide to rebel against their father's archaic traditions. Stars Om Puri, Linda Bassett, Jordan Poutledge and Archie Punjabi.

WHERE THE HEART IS

Based on the best-seller by Billie Letts, the story of a young woman who finds the strength to overcome adversity and begin a new life for herself and her child. Stars Natalie Portman, Ashley Judd, Stockard Channing and Joan Cusack. Directed by Matt Williams.

'El Dorado' shines in cleverly-crafted dialogue, action-packed animation

By Malcolm Ritter
Associated Press Writer

A.P.– DreamWorks Pictures poured a lot of big-name talent into the new animated movie "The Road to El Dorado," and the result will delight kids and amuse grown-ups.

Young children will see plenty of action, while older kids and grown-ups can appreciate the sight gags and the banter between the two heroes of this adventure.

It's the story of a pair of small-time con men, Tulio and Miguel (voiced by Kenneth Branagh and Kevin Kline, respectively) who beat the Spanish explorer Cortes to the fabled gold city of El Dorado in the 16th century. When they're welcomed as gods, they plan to go with that scam, scoop up lots of gold and beat it back to Spain.

In El Dorado they meet the sexy and cunning Chel (voiced by Rosie Perez), who regards them as her ticket to the outside world, an evil high priest (voice of Armand Assante) who sees through their ruse and sets out to destroy them, and the chief (voice of Edward James Olmos), a wise and decent man.

Of course, the con men's plan goes awry. Chel comes between the two longtime buddies; and Miguel finds the adulation of the people more alluring than the gleam of gold. But as Cortes and his men threaten the city, Tulio and Miguel save the day, sacrificing their dreams of riches and of life as gods. At least they end up with each other. And that sexy Chel, too.

Duelling fools: *Two-bit conmen Miguel (Kenneth Branagh) and Tulio (Kevin Kline) stage a duel to escape an angry mob in "The Road to El Dorado."*

Rated PG, the film includes a suggestive massage scene with Tulio and Chel, and later some obvious offscreen sex between them. The high priest also pushes his assistant to a watery death.

Apart from the clever lines that Tulio and Miguel toss at each other – some were ad-libbed in the recording studio by Kline – the movie is fun to watch for the visual treats. At the end, as Tulio, Miguel and Chel recover from their death-defying exit from El Dorado, their horse realizes that only he has wound up with any gold. Quietly, carefully, he slips his shiny golden horseshoes out of sight – a wise move, given the character of his companions. It's all done without a word, and it's hilarious.

Elton John wrote the music and Tim Rice the lyrics for the movie's songs, which are fine but not nearly as catchy as the numbers this duo created for "The Lion King."