

Review: Private Benjamin

"Private Benjamin" is not really about the army, but about a woman learning to make decisions; usually an extremely boring subject best left to the European directors who make movies for aesthetic rather than financial or popular reasons.

But since this is an American film, the producers found an excellent American setting for plot — the U.S. Army, the one place where soldiers concentrate on following instead of making decisions. Set against this background is Goldie Hawn as the prototype Jewish princess whose life changes after a rough 24 hours — which includes the death of her second husband right smack in the middle, dead center of their honeymoon. Yes.

From that scene on, "Private Benjamin" bumps and grinds into one of the funniest films this fall.

Director Howard Zieff and Hawn, also one of the producers, have developed a sophisticated "women's movie," woven with the natural humor that today's army deserves.

Zieff even parodies with standard film techniques. After the funeral sequence is a long shot of a low-life motel overlapped with narration, which usually weakens a scene because it tells instead of illustrates the action.

But Zieff and the writers pull a fast one by then revealing that Benjamin is crying to some poor soul on the telephone. Next the *piece de resistance*: she's bearing her soul to a late night audience participation radio talk show. In Philadelphia, no less.

Think — this woman who's just lost her husband, gotten meaningless advice from her relatives,

who's been wearing the same slip for the last seven nights, has turned to a talk show for help.

Sure, it's a sad comment on life, but a hilarious moment on the screen.

A recruiter who offered her on-air advice convinces her that a woman with her skills and future (zip on both) can make a good living in the army, maybe even own a condominium and a yacht along the San Diego marinas.

So she joins — only she doesn't land in sunny Southern California, but in swampish Biloxi, Miss. This is definitely the army, Ms. Jones.

Her first reaction to inspection, to barracks, to pushups is to quit: "May I speak to the manager of this place, I think I'm in the wrong place. I mean where are the yachts?"

No yachts, but plenty of obstacle

courses, physical and mental. Benjamin with her four cohorts manage to overcome the new army and its personnel, namely a captain named Lewis who outyells and outshames Sergeant Carter (of Gomer Pyle).

Capt. Lewis, played by Eileen Brennan, and the rest of the cast just don't stand around like furniture, but support the movie. Mary Kay Place, Mary Hartman's old neighbor, is marvelous as another trainee lost but found in Biloxi.

And Armand Assante may not win Best Supporting Actor at the next Oscar ceremony, he'd definitely get best looking. Assante plays a French gynecologist whom Benjamin loves. As far as he's acting ability, who knows? Who cares ...

Even those who may not like the

idea and organization of "Private Benjamin" should go at least for the humor. Some of action is the best comedy performed this year — especially when Benjamin and her Gang of Four, after some marijuana and grownup girl-talk about sex, manage to defeat the enemy in a massive war game staged by the leadership- (and sex-) crazed commander.

Can Private Judy Benjamin, for the first time in her 29 years, prove she can control her life — in or out of the army? And does actress Goldie Hawn for the first time in her 15-year career, prove she can successfully star in a major film?

You bet your army boots on both counts.

— KATHLEEN McELROY

Bruce Springsteen is back

The boss is back! The Asbury Flash does it again! Bruuuuce! What do you say when you've used all the cliches? After two years we are finally treated to a new Bruce Springsteen album.

"The River" is a two album set with twenty songs on it.

Thematically, "The River" is very close to its immediate predecessor, "Darkness on the Edge of Town." The songs themselves are slices of blue-collar life and death from a man who has obviously seen it for himself.

Springsteen and his coproducers, Jon Landau and guitarist Miami Steve Van Zandt, have opted for the spare sounding instrumental tracks that permeated

always left to the listener's imagination.

A real surprise comes in a song called "I Wanna Marry You." The singer pledges his love for a "working girl" supporting two children. With so much of today's music being directed at tearing the system down, "I Wanna Marry You" is like a breath of fresh air from 1958.

So it goes with the rest of the album. Springsteen is drawing on his life and experiences along with the type of music that he grew up with. His style is a hybrid of East Coast rhythm and blues and the doo-wop fifties.

"Sherry Darling" is a perfect example. You think you've heard it before because it's very reminiscent of fifties music, but it's new.

With songs like "Sherry Darling," "Out in the Street," "I'm a Rocker and You can Look (But You Better Not Touch)" Springsteen affords himself a little bit of a smile, something he hasn't done much since "The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle." "I'm a Rocker," for example opens with the lines

*I got an 007 watch and it's a one and only
I got an I-Spy beeper that tells me when you're lonely*

It ain't "Jungleland," folks.

The best cuts? When you're given such a large amount of material it's hard to say. Some songs are better than others.

The title cut is a pretty awesome piece of rock and roll. "The River" chronicles the post-adolescent life of a boy who has to get married because he got a girl pregnant. It's all there, the pain, the anger, the frustration and resentment. In the

beginning "going down to the river" was the personas' escape mechanism, but now even that doesn't help. He's locked in and he knows it. This song is Springsteen at his peak.

Other goodies include "Cadillac Ranch," an ode to Stanley Marcus 3's Cadillac Ranch outside of Amarillo, Texas. "Cadillac Ranch" is the best car song written since "Little Deuce Coupe." Springsteen tells us the Cadillac Ranch is for everyone.

*James Dean in that Mercury '49
Junior Johnson runnin' through the woods of Caroline
Even Burt Reynolds in his Black Trans-Am
All gonna meet at the Cadillac Ranch.*

One of the LP's finest moments, however, seems almost afterthought. At the end of side four there is a short little song called "Wreck on the Highway" about a guy who stops to help a man who has been in an automobile accident. The experience makes him realize how short life really is. The instrumental track is droning on and you can almost see how Springsteen's mind is working. "Wreck on the Highway" is truly an emotion packed number.

The E Street band is better than ever and Springsteen is one of the few modern rockers who can really be called a genius. Since the end of the "Born to Run" thing, as Springsteen calls it, and his break with former producer and manager Mike Appel, the boss has been making the music he wants to. The good thing about that is there are a lot of us out there who like to listen to the music he makes.

— GEOFF HACKETT

Review

"Darkness" and avoided the Phil Spector-ish "Wall of Sound" technique that was found on "Born to Run." The effect is sometimes beautifully simplistic and at others downright eerie.

Of the twenty songs, four of them were written during the 1978 "Darkness" tour and have appeared on numerous bootlegs. "The Ties That Bind" was the second set opener on the last half of the tour. It's straight ahead rock and roll reminiscent of "Badlands" and "Adam Raised a Cain." Guitars churn underneath as Danny Federici's organ and Clarence Clemmons sax provide the melody line.

"Independence Day," "Point Blank" and a different version of "Drive All Night" are all products of the '78 tour. "Independence Day" features Steve Van Zandt on acoustic guitar and is a tender song about the relationship between the singer and his father.

*"Poppa go to bed now, it's getting late
No amount of talk will change anything now
I'll be leaving in the morning from St. Mary's gate
We wouldn't change this thing even if we could somehow"*

It's all about growing up and its triumphs and misfortunes. Somehow in the end we can only hope that it worked out, Springsteen never tells us. And that's why he is such a powerful rock figure. Like a great writer, Springsteen involves his audience in the song. Something is

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