

Reviews

Photography, script, acting create constant tension in 'True Believer'

"True Believer"
Starring James Woods and Robert Downey Jr.
Directed by Joseph Ruben
Rated R

By S. Hoechstetter

REVIEWER

Today's average mystery/detective film has a murder, several car chases, gun fights and one or more love scenes. "True Believer" is not the average film. Director Joseph Ruben creates a constant level of intensity without using the old stand-bys.

This film has a murder but no car chases, no shootouts and no love scenes. So how can it be good? John W. Lindley's photography and Wesley Strick's well-written script are the base for the strength of "True Believer."

Lindley gives the audience a sense of entrapment by filming almost all of the scenes in small, dimly lit rooms. He makes the viewers feel terror as they watch a brutal knife

fight in a prison chapel. Witnesses' flashbacks during testimony are filmed in slow motion black and white, which suspends time and makes the rest of the action in the film that much more fast-paced.

Lindley's photography combined with the script, the editing and acting electrify the audience.

The audience at the sneak preview of the film reacted vocally to the tension on the screen. When a witness' testimony was in favor of the defense or when the antagonist got what he deserved, the audience whooped.

James Woods gives a powerful performance of cynical lawyer Eddie Dodd who specializes in acquitting drug dealers on technicalities. Dodd gained fame in the 1970s as a maverick with liberal 1960s ideals who won the cases other lawyers refused to take. Now he is a slave to his clients and the drugs they give him as payment for proving their "innocence."

Roger Baron (Robert Downey, Jr.) is an aspiring young lawyer who has been an admirer of Dodd's for many years. Baron, a recent law

school graduate, gets a job in Dodd's office so he can learn from his hero. But he is quickly disenchanted when he learns that Dodd smokes pot in his office and takes kickbacks from his clients.

When a Korean woman comes to Dodd's office pleading for him to defend her son for a murder he was accused of committing eight years earlier and a murder he committed in self-defense in prison, Dodd lends a deaf ear. Baron convinces him that her case is worth taking, and the action is non-stop from there.

Once Dodd decides to defend Shu Kai Kim (Yuji Okumoto) he is constantly on the trail of the truth. But the trail is long and bumpy.

Several powerful people do not want the truth known and they will do anything to keep Kim looking guilty. Every time Dodd takes one step forward something happens to make him take two steps back. The audience feels Dodd's frustration every time a key witness is murdered.

Still, he is relentless in his quest to prove Kim's innocence and his own self-worth. Dodd has to interrogate criminals, ex-cons, members of the

American Nazi Party, and a man committed to an insane asylum. He gets beaten up and receives a few death threats. Understandably, he gets discouraged, but he is determined to save his client.

Dodd gets help from his assistant, Baron, and a longtime lawyer friend, Kitty Greer (Margaret Colin). The trio acts more like detectives than lawyers as they try to find competent witnesses who are still alive. Dodd also has to do battle in the courtroom against the corrupt but smooth Manhattan district attorney. The two have locked horns in the past and the tension between them is obvious as they cross-examine and get into shouting matches in the courtroom.

Even though such scenarios probably do not happen to every criminal lawyer, Woods' performance makes the story seem realistic. His facial expressions relate his anguish, confusion and frustration. His lines are quick and energetic, as are his actions. He holds nothing back. That is why "True Believer" is exciting — even without car chases.

Unusual production of 'Lear' focuses on text, not packaging

By Cray Pixley

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

A disc ringed by five chairs provided the sole visual background in the exceptional and unusual production of *King Lear* by the Alliance for Creative Theatre, Education and Research last weekend.

Spectacle was not the goal for the five actors performing all of the roles in Shakespeare's tragedy last weekend in Rudder Theater. Props and costume changes were left behind in an attempt to bring the audience closer to the exhilarating text.

Storm scenes were weathered without sound, and the blinding of the Duke of Gloucester was accomplished without bloodshed.

The power of the production was in the text, not the set or costumes.

The cast chose contemporary costumes in earth tones in place of regal period costumes. A simple shawl and a stocking skull cap were the sole details used on the costumes.

Just as the fugitive Edgar transforms into the crazed Tom o' Bedlam, the five actors masterfully moved smoothly from character to character while never leaving the stage.

Changes in scenes were marked

by the sharp clap of hand boards used by the actors, and some segments of the play featured stylized movement.

Those characters not in the scene being performed occupied the chairs outside the circular set, entering the realm of Lear's ancient kingdom as the script demanded.

Some scenes demanded that the actor hold a conversation with himself while portraying the two characters in discussion.

The opening scene in *King Lear* began with Clifford Rose swaying from side to side in the dual roles of the Duke of Gloucester and the Earl of Kent discussing Gloucester's son Edmund.

The actors' carriage, voice and sometimes a ruffling of the hair brought about the transformation from character to character.

While watching an actor change characters with lightening speed proved thrilling, members of the audience who were unfamiliar with the play went diving for their programs. Many spectators kept their programs in hand throughout the night to help identify who was playing whom.

Regardless of the confusion, the

performances were superb.

Patti Love was electric as Goneril and Cordelia. Love moved from the poisonous Goneril to the pure Cordelia with a quick flick of her shawl. She put in triple time as Goneril's devoted but cruel steward Oswald.

Bernard Lloyd's Lear was an aged king, full of wrath yet remarkably spry. As madness overcame Lear, Lloyd fully reached his peak.

Geoffrey Church seemed to relish his role as the malicious and sneaky Edmund, who was bent on destroying his brother and father in the name of greed.

Church played through the added difficulty of killing one of the characters he was playing while also standing victorious over the victim in his roles as the warring brothers.

His portrayal of the mad beggar o'Bedlam served up a glass-eyed creature spouting both nonsense and wisdom.

The crucial role of Lear's fool was given an interesting twist with Vivien Heilbron taking the character past the male tradition into an asexual character.

The strength of all five actors' creative performances made the production of *King Lear* a fine one that rarely put a foot wrong.

Set, choreography, cast make 'One' great play

By Shane Hall

REVIEWER

MSC-OPAS' Focus on the Performing Arts week closed Friday night with a spectacular presentation of the Gershwin musical, "My One and Only."

The two-hour musical featured the music of George and Ira Gershwin, outstanding choreography and great performances by the entire cast.

Abe Reybold shined as Capt. Billy Buck Chandler, a Texas hayseed with aspirations to be the first man to fly nonstop across the Atlantic to Paris, France. Reybold was entertaining from start to finish.

Chandler's dreams of fame are interrupted when he falls for Edythe Herbert (Liz McCarthy), a former English Channel swimmer and current water ballet star.

Herbert, however, is managed by the nasty, jealous Russian prince, Nicolai Erraclayovitch Tchatchavadze (David J. Schuller).

McCarthy, who has performed in such musicals as "Singin' in the Rain" and "Oklahoma!" shines as Edythe Herbert.

McCarthy's singing and acting abilities made her performance a delight to watch.

Schuller, as Prince Nikki, injected just the right amount of humor into the nasty character he plays to get a few laughs of his own.

Other performances worth noting were Jorge Luis Abreu as the hilarious Rev. J.D. Montgomery and Claudia Lynne Miller as Mickey. Montgomery is a minister by day and a bar owner by night. The character is a minor part in the show, but Abreu makes him a memorable one.

Mickey is Capt. Chandler's foul-mouthed mechanic who turns out to be a federal agent in disguise.

Aggie Cinema film preview

By Shane Hall

REVIEWER

"Dona Flor and Her Two

Husbands," made in 1977, is a Brazilian comedy that offers moviegoers the chance to see one of today's best actresses in one of her early roles.

Sonia Braga, memorable for her roles in "Kiss of the Spider Woman" and "The Milagro Beanfield War," stars as Dona Flor, a woman who marries for the second time only to have the ghost of her first husband appear.

Flor's first husband, Vadinho, is an abusive drunk and a compulsive gambler. His only saving grace (as far as Flor is concerned) is that he is a good lover. Vadinho dies at the film's beginning from excessive Carnival revelry. We follow Flor's marriage to him through a long flashback.

Midway through the film, Flor marries the town pharmacist. He is Vadinho's opposite — successful, financially responsible and attentive to his wife.

However, Flor finds him less than satisfying in the bedroom. In fact, the bored look on her face suggests she is making love with the Pillsbury Doughboy. It is at this point that the ghost of Vadinho appears, seated on a dresser and laughing lecherously at the two.

Director Bruno Barreto presents a view of marriage in this film suggesting that a perfect spouse is not something one can find in one person. Each husband was (un)satisfying in his own way.

Her solution: keep both of them. Her cloddish second husband is unaware of Vadinho's presence. He is visible only to Flor.

"Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands" will be shown at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday in Rudder Theater as part of MSC Aggie Cinema's International Series. Admission is \$2.50.



Photo by Mike C. Mulvey

'Burbs' wastes Hanks' talents, audience's time

"The 'Burbs"
Starring Tom Hanks, Bruce Dern and Carrie Fisher
Directed by Joe Dante
Rated PG
**
By Shane Hall

REVIEWER

Life in the suburbs becomes a life in hell for Tom Hanks in the "The 'Burbs," a new comedy directed by Joe Dante ("Gremlins"). Unfortunately, the film is not funny. In fact, after seeing it, it is easy to forget that Hanks is the funny and talented actor who recently received an Academy Award nomination for his role in "Big."

Hanks stars as Ray Peterson, a man who decides to spend his week's vacation from work sleeping late, watching television and spending time with his wife, Carol (Carrie Fisher). His week of rest and relaxation is interrupted when curiosity arises about the Klopek's, the weird neighbors living next door.

It seems that nobody has ever met them or even seen them. They stay inside their crumbling house that sticks out like a sore thumb alongside the freshly-painted houses and manicured lawns around it.

Ray and two friends, Art, an overweight clod (Rick Documun) and Mark, a tightly-wound Vietnam veteran (Bruce Dern), decide to do some snooping when their curiosity about the mysterious neighbors rises. They find a human femur in a yard and notice that something in the Klopek's' basement spews jets of flame that light up the entire basement. The three begin to suspect that the Klopek's are a family of satanists and psychotics.

What we have here is a movie whose "creepy neighbors invade suburbia" plot is similar to the John Belushi-Dan Aykroyd film, "Neighbors," another dreadful film. Dante's direction, with its constant use of the camera to zoom in on the characters' faces, is an attempt at making "The 'Burbs" a horror-comedy film. However, nothing in the movie works.

Hanks' monologue toward the movie's end about who the really crazy people in the suburbs are seems to be an attempt at giving this movie a message about suburbanites, but it is a feeble attempt that turns out to be too little, too late.

The movie's only humorous parts are mostly in what can be considered inside jokes. For example, there is a box of Gremlins cereal in Ray's house (Dante directed "Gremlins"). When Dern's character appears on the screen, the music we hear is a brief piece from "Patton." Jerry Goldsmith, who did the music for "The 'Burbs," also scored the music to "Patton."

Inside jokes, however, do not make an unfunny movie funny. Hanks is mostly reduced to the role of a straight man in this film. This is far from appropriate for the actor who was so hilarious in "Big."

The sterile, WASP-ish nature of suburban life is a perfect target for a satirical film. Too bad the film makers wasted the opportunity to make one.

Elvis is still alive!

Elvis Costello
Spike
Warner Bros. Records

By S. Hoechstetter

REVIEWER

Elvis IS alive! I just finished listening to that dark-haired crooner's new album. His voice isn't quite as smooth as it used to be, but he's got a new look. He has lost weight and wears black-rimmed glasses. No more of those tight-fitting satin and fringe outfits either. His new musical style is interesting. Elvis, you sure have changed since "Jailhouse Rock," but I still love you!

What? This isn't Elvis Presley? Elvis Costello? Oh, I'm so embarrassed. OK, let's start over.

Elvis Costello is still alive! In fact, the eclectic rock-n-roll veteran has been alive ever since his birth. Amazing. Anyway, his new album, *Spike* could be his best effort to date. He offers an interesting variety of instrumentals and lyrics that most musicians avoid. Costello is an artist in the purest sense. He is not afraid to experiment.

Spike is a conglomerate of jazz, rock 'n' roll and the blues. Costello uses instruments typically found in these musical styles to create the right sound for each song. He also gets help from musicians such as Paul McCartney on bass, Chrissie Hynde's vocals, Derek Bell, and T. Bone Burnett.

"Let Him Dangle," an anti-capital punishment song, is an example of Costello's swanky blues style. It is interesting to note that nowhere on the album can an electric keyboard be heard. In songs such as "Let Him Dangle," if Costello wants a piano sound, he uses the conventional, but almost extinct practice, of using a real piano.

Costello uses several unique items as instruments as well. In "Let Him Dangle," Michael Blair plays a Chinese drum and an

Oldsmobile hubcap. Other unique instruments heard on the album include a bouzouki, which is kind of like a flute, Uilleann pipes, an accordion, mandolin, glockenspiel, a ship's bell and a Martian-Dog Bark — whatever that is. Don't let the foreign instruments scare you. They are just Costello's way of creating unique sounds which separate him from other musicians.

"Deep Dark Truthful Mirror" is a jazz tune featuring The Dirty Dozen Brass Band. Their trumpets, saxophones and trombones bring an interesting big band jazz sound to a rock 'n' roll album. The Dirty Dozen Brass Band is also featured in the songs "Chewing Gum" and "Stalin Malone."

"Stalin Malone" has no vocals, just the sounds of The Dirty Dozen Brass Band. However, the album jacket has lyrics printed for "Stalin Malone," a shady, angry character who is personified in the music.

"Chewing Gum" has some great trumpet and baritone sax in it played by The Dirty Dozen Brass Band. But not all of the songs have such a heavy jazz influence.

"Veronica" is fast-paced rock 'n' roll, featuring Paul McCartney on Hofner bass and T. Bone Burnett on acoustic guitar. McCartney composed and arranged "Veronica" with D.P.A. MacManus.

"Tramp the Dirt Down" is a ballad that makes a sad comment on humans and life and death. "Pads, Paws and Claws" is a loud, boisterous and dirty song. If this were country and western it would be one of the most popular songs at The Dixie Chicken. T. Bone Burnett plays trigger bass in this song.

He might share the same first name with Elvis "The King" Presley, but Costello has a style that is unmistakably his own — a style that already has made him a legend in his own time. There must be something magical about the name Elvis.

Arcade

(Continued from page 11)

has enough spare time. At his skill level, games can take a while.

Lane also said she plays every day, simply because she loves computers. A direct opposite to Lane and Skinner is Chuck Thomas, a senior economics major, who said he spends at most \$5 a year on video games because he has more important things to do with his money.

"There are some incredible games out there," Thomas said. "I love to play, but the problem is that some of the games I like to play cost 75 cents or a dollar. I can do a load of laundry for that."

Skinner agrees with Thomas on that point, saying he never puts more than one quarter in a game.

"I've seen people spend \$5 on a game (to keep it going) and not get any farther on it," Skinner said.

The most popular game ever on the A&M campus is Galaga, said Ross Todaro, Jr., who is a route manager for TAVS, Inc., the company that supplies the machines on campus.

Since Galaga came out nearly eight years ago, he said it has been played at A&M more times than any other.

Todaro also said the most popular game now is Quarterback, a video football game that has four quarters of playing time.

At Bally's Aladdin's Castle, Price said Robocop, a game version of the movie, is the most popular game, but the racing game Final Lap and the machine gun shoot-em-up Operation Wolf are constantly played.

Thomas said he would like to see "more realistic games at more realistic prices" in the future.

What the average player wants and what he gets may be two different things.

Beck said he foresees more simulator-type games, such as those of After Burner, which resembles the cockpit of an F-14 jet. In the game, the player sees the game as a pilot would.

Todaro said 3-D is definitely a possibility, but the main development he sees for the future of video games is that they will become more sophisticated.

"They will become more user-friendly," he said. "They will give the player the feeling he is actually in the game instead of just playing it."

According to Todaro, that may be accomplished by the addition of more advanced controlling mechanisms.

"It's fun to look at a friend and say 'I bet I can outscore you,'" he said.

Skinner said jokingly that he prefers "violent, destructive games."

"I do like action games, but I'm really a pretty happy camper," he said.

Violence and destruction aren't what most females like to see in video games, Price and Lane say.

Both said that women prefer racing games such as Pole Position, space games like Galaga, or other subdued games such as the recent popular Paper Boy.

The only explanation Lane offered for women's disinterest in warlike games is that they don't like violence.

"We're not into fighting," she said.

Unfortunately for female video game players, a multitude of such violent games have appeared on the market in recent years.

Names such as Devastator, P.O.W., Time Soldier and Bad Boys speak for themselves.

"I'd like to get away from war games," Lane said in reference to what she thinks the future of the video game will hold.

"I'd rather see manufacturers go back and improve some of the older games, maybe make them 3-D."

Lane isn't the only one who would like to see 3-D — realistic 3-D — enter the world of video games.

Skinner said he would like to see a real 3-D game, although he added that he will probably have outgrown the machines by the time one is invented.

"I'll be older and will have more important things to do with my money," he said.

Thomas said he would like to see "more realistic games at more realistic prices" in the future.

What the average player wants and what he gets may be two different things.

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