

Disappointing summer film season looks to improve with release of 'Die Hard II'

By TODD STONE
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I believe there is an entertaining, hit-film out there in the movie cosmos. I just haven't discovered it yet. The Hubble telescope probably couldn't find a recent quality film either.

As the summer season approaches the half-way mark, would-be blockbusters have failed to earn more than average grades.

Certainly, summer movies have still made money. "Total Recall" had a fine opening weekend at \$25 million, and "Dick Tracy" appears to have enough momentum to be given "hit" status.

Still, neither film has offered the quality that a blockbusting film is supposed to have. "Recall" had an unforgivably dense ending, and while "Dick Tracy" amuses, it's not the God's-gift-to-the-world film it claims to be.

For my entertainment dollar, I'll take last summer's "Lethal Weapon 2," "Batman" and "When Harry Met Sally" over "Total Recall," "Dick Tracy" and "Bird On A Wire" any day.

"Another 48 Hours" is a pitiful sequel that never should have been made. Yet, it was labeled by pre-release hype as a classic Eddie Murphy hit. You could do a lot of fertilizing with that one.

With the exception of a few humorous moments, Alan Alda's "Betsy's Wedding" failed to be the quality yuppy film of the summer. But Alda has a strong following who will see any movie he does, so "Betsy" should make money.

Films that should at least be given the "held their own" label goes to "Gremlins 2" and "Robo Cop 2." While not being great films, they at least entertained without hyping themselves as the greatest movies ever made.



Bruce Willis returns as detective John McClane for more explosive action in "Die Hard 2."

However, the summer season is not over, and a new hope, "Die Hard 2" opens this Wednesday. If any film has a chance to be the quality blockbuster of the summer, it's the "Die Hard" sequel.

Bruce Willis returns, as does the

supporting cast of the original film. This time, Willis' indestructible alter-ego, John McClane, must stop terrorists who have taken over the international airport in Washington D.C. Sounds like fun.

Further, there hasn't been a quality comedy release this summer.

However, Bill Murray may change that with his new film, "Quick Change," appearing July 12.

With Oscar winner Geena Davis, Randy Quaid and Jason Robards as the supporting cast, "Quick Change" may be the first comedy-hit of the summer.

For you cartoon fans, Disney is re-releasing "The Jungle Book," an animated classic. "Jetsons: The Movie" will also be arriving soon, so kids and kids-at-heart should have something fun to see.

At best it's been an average start for movies but don't lose hope. The summer movie season can still make a comeback, and entertaining movies may once again return to the big screen.

Summer films earn poor grades

- Total Recall — B-
- Another 48 Hours — F
- Fire Birds — D
- Bird On A Wire — D
- Back To The Future III B-

- Dick Tracy — C-
- Robo Cop 2 — C+
- Betsy's Wedding — D
- Days Of Thunder — C+
- Gremlins 2 — C+

Underdeveloped characters weaken Alda's efforts with 'Betsy's Wedding'

By DON ATKINSON JR.
Of The Battalion Staff

Riddle: How are Alan Alda and Woody Allen alike?

Answer: They're not. Unfortunately, Alda seems to be trying hard with his latest film, "Betsy's Wedding," to imitate the famous filmmaker's quirky style.

Alda was part of the cast of Allen's 1989 film, "Crimes And Misdemeanors," playing the part of an arrogant filmmaker. Perhaps working close to Allen rubbed off on him.

The sad part is that Alda has already established a style of his own with previous films such as "The Four Seasons" and "Sweet Liberty." His attempt to imitate Allen's style is simply a waste of talent.

"Betsy's Wedding," written and directed by Alda, is an upbeat film about the lives of the people affected by an impending wedding.

The father, played by Alda, is struggling hard to provide an impressive wedding for his daughter Betsy, played by Molly Ringwald.

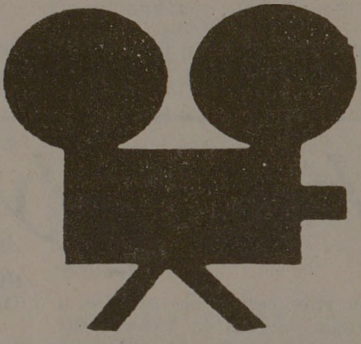
Alda wanders through the film talking to the ghost of his dead father, playing against imaginary basketball teams and trying to deal with strange dreams. His character is simply a cardboard cut-out of Alda himself with little depth added.

Ringwald essentially plays the

Betsy's Wedding
Starring Alan Alda and Molly Ringwald
Directed By Alan Alda
Rated R

same character she did in "Pretty In Pink," only older. Once again, her wardrobe is in a clash by itself with strange colors, bows and ribbons all thrown together.

No insight into her character is



given, so she comes across as a bad-tempered flake. That's too bad since Ringwald is a talented actress who could have done better with a more complete character.

The only highlight of "Betsy's

Wedding" comes in the form of a romance between Stevie Dee (Anthony LaPaglia) and Connie Hopper (Ally Sheedy).

Connie is the other daughter of Alda's character and works as a police officer. Stevie, the son of a Mafia boss, falls head over heels in love with her after one glance.

Stevie is an endearing character, played to perfection by LaPaglia. His gentlemanly attempts to win Connie's heart are full of warm emotion.

Standing on her doorstep, Stevie asks first if he can kiss Connie good-night. She consents and then invites him in following the kiss. Stevie politely declines, saying that it isn't proper on a first date.

He treats Connie like a lady, something she is not used to. Sheedy does a good job of showing how hard it is for her character to be treated as anything other than one of the boys.

Sadly enough, Stevie and Connie are the only two well-developed characters in "Betsy's Wedding."

Alda should have concentrated more on getting inside his characters and letting us see what makes them tick. Instead, he seems content to prop up a lot of stereotypes, some even offensive, and hope they are funny.

Take my advice: "Betsy's Wedding" is a wedding bouquet you don't want to catch.

CBS pushes hope, new ideas

LOS ANGELES (AP)— There is something slightly strange about sitting in a darkened ballroom for three days watching television with about 1,000 CBS representatives.

For one thing, the hype is overwhelming. The sound level is loud. The speeches are a curious mixture of cheerleading and defensiveness.

Welcome to the annual convention for the eye network's affiliated stations, held last week at the Century Plaza Hotel.

Like many conventions, the CBS gathering was long on glad-handing and short on substance. ABC had its convention in the same spot two weeks before. NBC held its convention in Washington earlier last month.

The CBS function was different, mostly because the network is in last place and has been there for a while.

This point is not forgotten by CBS executives, or the stations across the country that carry its programming.

Acknowledging this, while at the same time putting on a brave, optimistic face, makes for a schizophrenic three days.

It also shows a side of television never seen on the screen in your home. This is the business of TV, where demographics are talked about ad nauseam, where words

like "breakout characters" and "commercial concepts" are standard phrases.

For hours on end, CBS executives use a giant monitor to trot out their new shows, would-be stars and advertising strategies.

It's no fun being the bottom-rated network, but CBS's acknowledgement of that fact was funny at times.

Take the entire session devoted to rolling out the fall advertising campaign. The official slogan and song is the Motown classic "Get Ready."

Promotion executives said other Motor City hits also had been considered. Among them: "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" and "Keep Holding On."

Grant Tinker, the driving force behind television classics such as "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," introduced his new production for CBS titled "WIOU," an irreverent but realistic look at a local television news station.

The network's solicitousness toward its affiliates was evident by Tinker's remarks to the news managers seated in the delegation.

"I want to offer all of you reassurance if you're worried that we will ridicule or trivialize what (you) do," Tinker said. "I promise you that we will not embarrass you."

The mea culpas and apologetic tones were balanced by rah-rah pledges of CBS being "on the move," having "innovative" fall shows and going where the network has not consistently been lately — namely, out of last place.

CBS' ambitious plans include a complete overhaul of its late-night schedule to compete with Johnny Carson on NBC and Ted Koppel's "Nightline" on ABC.

Its Tuesday-night strategy against ABC's powerhouse "Roseanne" is a movie package of box-office hits such as "Field of Dreams," "Fatal Attraction" and "Moonstruck."

Specials, a ratings-booster staple for CBS, will feature Cher, the Muppets, the Grammy awards, an "I Love Lucy Christmas" and the People's Choice awards.

"If we're going to make this work," said entertainment president Jeff Sagansky, "we really need your support."

Or, as CBS Broadcast Group president Howard Stringer put it, quoting Shakespeare's Henry V, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother."

Mediocre 'Live It Up' fails as latest CSN release without Young

Crosby Stills and Nash
Live It Up
Atlantic

By TODD STONE
Of The Battalion Staff

Where's Neil Young when you need him?

After listening to *Live It Up*, the latest release by Crosby, Stills and Nash, I couldn't believe this legendary trio could make such a boring collection of music.

What a difference a few years can make.

Neil Young and CSN re-united in 1988 to make *American Dream*, a solid pop-rock album. Although Young was the strongest song writer on that album, I never suspected such a drop-off in song quality when CSN returned to the studio.

The root of CSN's problem seems to be a lack of studio interest. Neither Crosby, Stills nor Nash played instruments on three tracks of the 10 track release. Further, two other

songs would have been performed only by studio musicians if not for Stills knocking off a few guitar solos.

CSN either wrote or co-wrote seven songs, but it would have been better if they had left the writing as well as the playing to the studio stand-bys — the stand-bys couldn't have done much worse.

Live It Up begins with the title song, written by long-time CSN band member Joe Vitale. Aside from a slick guitar solo by Stills, Vitale played every instrument on the track. The song is a promising pop-synth tune, and Nash's lead vocals were fine.

However, the trouble begins with "If Anybody Had A Heart" by J.D. Suther and Danny Kortchmar. This is a weak cover-version of a terribly sappy tune. It's never a good sign when the second song is a lame cover.

"Tomboy," the only song Stills wrote on his own, is a borderline-catchy tune, but it needs more of a hook in the melody. "Haven't We Lost Enough" is a Stills song written with Kevin Cronin that returns to Stills' classic acoustic sound.

"I never would have suspected such a drop-off in song quality when CSN returned to the studio."

Even this song disappoints. It has a sultry feel to it, but the lack of classic CSN harmonies leaves a hollow feeling.

As a matter of fact, there is little harmony throughout this release. Either Crosby, Stills or Nash sings lead, but they seldom sing together for that classic CSN harmony — the group's greatest strength.

Of course, most of the songs have weak melodies, so the incentive to harmonize is diminished.

However, there is one diamond in the ruff. "(Got To Keep) Open," written by Nash and Stills, is a solid up-beat tune. The vocals are above-average (Stills sings lead), and the melody is memorable and fun. It's the type of foot-stomping, good-time song this album desperately needed. Bruce Hornsby indistinctly played piano and accordion on the

track.

After "Open," the album finishes with a whimper. "House of Broken Dreams," "Arrows" and "After The Dolphin" have the same sound — moderate to slow tempos with forgettable choruses and melodies. Hum.

Sax virtuoso Branford Marsalis plays some slick sax on otherwise simple sap songs "Yours and Mine" and "Arrows." Marsalis makes the worthless songs worth listening to.

Peter Frampton appears on "Straight Line," another weak-sister song. His guitar solo was mediocre compared to Stills on "Live It Up."

However, Stills deserves no accolades for his efforts. He is by far the best song writer and musician in CSN, and he did nothing to raise this album above mediocrity. The man can still play a mean guitar, but he needs to get off his butt and do something in the studio.

If CSN wants to be considered creatively viable, then they better do a whole lot better with their next effort.

If not, they could always give Neil Young a call.

