

Summer movie season makes solid comeback

New films 'Presumed Innocent,' 'Freshman' strengthen mediocre season

Brando parodies past success with funny, original 'Freshman'

By John Righter

There are very few actors capable of isolating themselves for 10 years on a Taitian island, and then out of the blue walk stone cold into a lead role and reel off an Oscar-deserving performance.

In fact, Marlon Brando might be the only one.

Brando must be honing his acting skills by splicing some lengthy soliloquys at the dinner table, 'cause the only thing the two-time Oscar winner has lost during his isolation has been the control of his waistline.

Brando is still undoubtedly one of the greats, and his latest performance for "The Freshman," his first starring role since "The Formula" in 1980, is once again both baffling and outstanding.

"The Freshman" offers another intriguing character for the enigmatic Brando, an actor accustomed to causing confusion in eclectic and controversial films such as "Last Tango In Paris," "Apocalypse Now," "Superman" and "One-Eyed Jacks."

In "The Freshman," Brando plays the powerful, but fatherly, Carmine Sabatini, a "Godfather" parody who becomes a mentor to Clark Kellogg (Matthew Broderick), a young film student who has come upon hard luck since his transfer to New York from Vermont.

Kellogg is introduced to Sabatini by Victor Ray (Bruno Kirby), a small-time hustler who cons Kellogg out of all his belongings, and then when caught by his possessionless victim, offers to get him a job with his Uncle Carmine.

After having been indoctrinated to the perils of big-city life in a mere 20 minutes, with no expectation of assistance from an unsympathetic



Matthew Broderick, Bruno Kirby and Marlon Brando (left to right) star in the comedy "The Freshman."

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faculty advisor and an equally callous environmental-extremist stepdad, Kellogg hesitatingly accepts Sabatini's offer to deliver a package for the exorbitant wage of \$500.

Kellogg, a college student who we are led to believe is quite bright, somehow has difficulty realizing

what he has gotten himself into with Sabatini and his new job.

Before he can yell "Godfather II," Kellogg delivers a Komodo Dragon, is chased by the Wildlife and Fisheries Department for illegalizing transporting the endangered reptile, is involuntarily engaged to

Sabatini's lovely daughter, Tina (Penelope Ann Miller), and becomes a "permanent" member of the Sabatini family.

Speculating over his dire straits, Kellogg figures during one of his many asides, "There's a kind of freedom in being completely

screwed, because you know things can't get any worse."

Unfortunately, before Kellogg finally resolves his life, things get even more unusual and complicated.

It's uncertain how writer and director Andrew Bergman was able to coerce Brando into portraying the

tongue-in-cheek Sabatini in what is his rare film appearance. The one surety with Brando is that you can possibly guess what the man will do.

After a string of graphically intense roles, Carmine Sabatini is surprisingly warm and funny character. With Sabatini, Brando is not only the most captivating figure on screen, but also, somewhat surprisingly, the funniest.

The parodic parallels between Don Corleone and Carmine Sabatini are wry and witty, and Brando combines old- and new-fashioned Italian stereotypes, as well as male and female caricatures into the persona of Sabatini — an emotional man not averse to tears, cheek twisting or male lip kisses.

On the other hand, Sabatini also threatens stock brokers, rips off priceless pieces of art (try the Mona Lisa) and still hails Mussolini (In one scene Kellogg asks Sabatini if the framed picture on the wall is indeed Mussolini, to which the kingpin replies, "Well, it ain't Tony Bennet.")

An equally bizarre casting role goes to Bert Parks as himself emceeding the entertainment at the opulent gourmet-club feast (the destination of the Komodo dragon). Parks is even more of a parody, performing hilarious tongue-in-cheek versions of "Tequila" (complete with sombrero and moraccas), "Maggies Farm" and "There She Is, Miss America," to the prestigious gathering.

"The Freshman" really shines through Bergman's off-beat casting and character exchanges. Bergman inserts plenty of quirks and little loops to keep his film fun.

Still, for Brando's performance and Bergman's honest attempt at a superior and original comedy, "The Freshman" is definitely worth a view.

'Young Guns II' matches quality of original

By Todd Stone

"Young Guns II" has all the action, characters and style of the first film.

Being as good as the original is just dandy for most sequels, especially if you thought the first film was entertaining. Unfortunately, I think the original "Young Guns" was an average film, and the sequel, just the same.

Emilio Estevez returns as Billy The Kid, and it doesn't take long for him to re-unite with some of his renegade pals from the first film.

Doc, played by Kiefer Sutherland, married and became a school teacher before he was captured by a lynch squad. Thrown in a prison hole, he finds another first film pal, the stoic Mexican-Indian Chavez (Lou Diamond Phillips).

Billy conveniently happens along to rescue them, and the gang is together again with a few newcomers. So what happens?

Well, it seems the New Mexico governor promised to give Billy a full pardon in exchange for testifying against members of the "Lincoln County Cattle War," in which Billy and the gang participated during the first film.

Of course, the governor lied, so Billy and the boys are forced to flee across New Mexico with ex-Billy gang member Pat Garrett (William Peterson) and a New Mexico posse chasing after them.

Unfortunately, that's about it for plot, so the narrative painfully and tediously ho-hums along. There is some good action scenes here-and-there, but not enough to make up for the simple story.

Like the first film, the humor is the best element, especially from Estevez as the Kid. He seems to be the only one enjoying this movie. Estevez is convincing as the charismatic killer and borderline psycho Billy, but he's the only interesting performer on screen.

Sutherland is a fine actor, but screenwriter John Fusco gave him little to do other than being a martyr as Doc. Phillips has the intense screen presence but little to say as Chavez. Christian Slater and Alan Ruck's performances as new gang members were wasted.

Probably the most confusing character was Pat Garrett. Peterson was fine in this role, but it seemed the filmmakers couldn't decide if Gar-



Billy The Kid's gang is back for more shoot-'em-up action in "Young Guns II."

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rett should be a ruthless hunter or a flake.

In one scene he may be intimidating, but in the next Garrett seems like an insecure ego-maniac. I don't mind my villains having big egos, but they need to be sure of themselves before they go out and kill people.

Director Geoff Murphy has some slick moments in this film with panoramic shots of limestone canyons, plateaus and buttes, but it seems the simple narrative was too cumbersome to be compelling.

It's a shame. Both "Young Guns" films had the potential of being quite good. But the actors are forced to play generic western characters (except for Estevez). They do it with intensity and zest, but it's not enough.

I admit every good western has stereotypes, but it seems that to be interesting nowadays, there needs to be something more.

In case you're a Bon Jovi fan, his music was barely noticeable through most of the film. What music I did identify as being Jovi's was rather

tame at best.

With more characterization, this film could easily have been more intriguing. But if you like the stars, maybe seeing them in a western might be somewhat fun.

I suppose if you have two hours to kill, "Young Guns II" will probably handle the job. But take my advice: wait for the film to reach dollar-pricing. You won't have to wait long.

Taut 'Presumed Innocent' blends drama, suspense

By Don Atkinson Jr.

Presumed Innocent
Starring Harrison Ford and Raul Julia
Directed By Alan J. Pakula
Rated R

Did he kill her or didn't he? That question will haunt you throughout "Presumed Innocent," the new suspense-thriller starring Harrison Ford, until the last moments of the film.

Ford stars as Rusty Sabich, a prosecutor in the district attorney's office who has had an affair with a co-worker, Carolyn Polhemus (Greta Scacchi). When she is brutally raped and murdered, all the evidence points to Rusty.

Needing a good lawyer, he hires Sandy Stern, played by Raul Julia ("Kiss Of The Spiderwoman" and "The Morning After"). Stern is considered to be one of the best lawyers around, and he is Rusty's only hope to be cleared of the charges against him.

"Presumed Innocent," based on Scott Turow's 1987 best-selling novel, is a relentless film.

From the beginning of the film when Rusty receives a letter reading, "Stop it. I know it's you," until the end when the identity of the killer is finally revealed, "Presumed Innocent" never lets up on the suspense.

Director Alan J. Pakula ("All The President's Men" and "Sophie's Choice") maintains an even

The film offers no easy resolutions, no quick explanations. The viewer is required to participate in the proceedings as much as the characters. Viewers used to loud, car-chase-filled-cop movies will most likely be bored with "Presumed Innocent."

pace throughout the film. The action is never rushed or slowed needlessly.

Adding to the moody atmosphere of "Presumed Innocent" is an excellent musical score by John Williams ("The Accidental Tourist" and "Jaws").

Without a doubt, "Presumed Innocent" is a very deep film, demanding intense concentration and attention to every detail.

Viewers used to loud, car-

chase-filled-cop movies will most likely be bored with "Presumed Innocent." The action is subtle with most dialogue delivered in hushed tones. The film offers no easy resolutions, no quick explanations. The viewer is required to participate in the proceedings as much as the characters.

For example, the letter Rusty receives at the beginning of the film is never explained later. If you hadn't been paying attention to an earlier line of dialogue, you would have no idea how or why the letter figures into the plot.

Also, "Presumed Innocent" leaves you very disturbed at the end. The film requires you to think about the plot resolution and draw your own conclusions.

Although "Presumed Innocent" will probably not have people standing in long lines to see it, the film is one of the best available at the movie theaters right now.

The film features a strong cast with good dialogue and excellent direction.

Ford plays Rusty as a multi-layered character, obsessed one moment and ruthlessly professional the next. Bonnie Bedelia (Bruce Willis' wife in "Die Hard" and "Die Hard 2") turns in a strong performance as Rusty's wife, Barbara, who not only must deal with her husband's infidelity, but with the possibility that he could be a murderer.

The two strongest performances in "Presumed Innocent" are undoubtedly those of Julia as Stern and Paul Winfield as the judge presiding over Rusty's murder trial. Both actors bring a touch of humor to the film that is absent elsewhere.

"Presumed Innocent" will make you writhe in quiet suspense. If you're a fan of these types of films, then "Presumed Innocent" is not to be passed up.