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Cover Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack

Mr. and Mrs. Carnell Nealy Sr. from Texas City pose in front of the E. Martin Luther King street Church of Christ where Mr. Nealy is a minister.

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Film introduces French talent to mainstream moviegoers

By Julia Spencer

Although burly French actor Gérard Depardieu is already well-known to American foreign film devotees through his masterful portrayals of characters such as Martin Guerre, Jean de Florette and most recently, Cyrano de Bergerac, *Green Card* marks his Hollywood debut.

Especially created for him by director Peter Weir ("Dead Poets Society"), the film is a showcase for the actor's considerable charisma and rough-hewn charm, but the ferocious intensity which has made his French films so powerful is largely held in check here. Only a very few scenes allow him to let loose and dazzle us with his ability to careen from the forceful to the tender, from the sweeping to the precise and to enthrall us with his command of the French language.

Green Card's catchy plotline, which is sketched out on the movie posters, goes something like this: boy marries girl, boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love. Huh? Well, it's like this. Georges Fauré (Depardieu), a disheveled French composer, wants a green card so he can stay in New York. Bront Parrish (Andie MacDowell), a genteel horticulturalist, wants a greenhouse so she can garden to her heart's content.

So, a mutual friend arranges the details, they marry one afternoon; and after the ceremony, eagerly go their separate ways. Georges' immediate resident status gives him his all-important green card, and Bront's married status nets her a beautiful apart-

ment furnished with exotic plants and a splendid greenhouse. The only problem is that U.S. Immigration Services is clamping down on this sort of in-name-only marriage. They are sending a couple of delegates to check and see if it is truly a bona fide relationship.

Thus, Georges and Bront, as different and as intolerant of each other's habits as Oscar and Felix, must some-

only the props they have in the apartment.

In many ways this is a delightful movie, a diverting foray into the high-concept land of what-if? In the last 15 minutes, however, the audience is asked to believe in the sudden blossoming of love between two people who up to this point have not been terribly loving or lovable.

Andie MacDowell's character espe-

Green Card
starring: Gérard Depardieu, Andie MacDowell
now showing at Schulman Six
rated PG-13

how get to know each other well enough, and get along convincingly enough to survive close scrutiny and a barrage of detailed questions to persuade the officers that they are indeed a happily married couple.

This process is the basis for some hilarious and touching situation comedy, as the two try to become accustomed to living with their opposite. In my favorite scene, Georges unnerves the guests at a fancy dinner party with his percussive piano playing, and then surprises them again with an unexpectedly tender and poetic selection. Here, Depardieu is in his element, and he displays all the strength and vulnerability of his formidable talent.

Another funny sequence occurs when the two attempt to create a photo album of vacations and special occasions in a single afternoon, using

cially, while beautiful and believably portrayed, comes off as being overly frigid and uptight, and Georges' "French-ness" and artistic skill, while fairly captivating, do not entirely counterbalance his obstinacy and careless habits. In one sense these shortcomings are refreshingly real, and take off some of the Hollywood gloss which spoils many a cinematic romance; it's always nice to know you don't have to look like Tom Cruise to get a girl like MacDowell. I also realize that opposites do frequently attract, but here it seems a bit more like perversity than affection; the movie doesn't last long enough for the characters' motives to really jell.

In any event, it's a lot of fun, and there are some wonderful supporting players, including a tiny, inquisitive old neighbor woman and a worldly friend of Bront's, perty played by

Bebe Neuwirth, better known as Lilith on TV's "Cheers."

As for the Golden Globe award for best actor, although this film gives him a much wider audience, this is certainly not Depardieu's greatest role, since he is essentially playing himself. If you want to see him at his best, run, don't walk to see him quip and swash-buckle as the ultimate Cyrano de Bergerac, now playing at the Greenway III in Houston, or rent one of his many films out on video.

A Golden Globe for Best Picture is similarly misplaced: this movie is pretty good and frequently amusing, but to be really good, it should have made up its mind what kind of movie to be and where to focus. It is not entirely original, either; the plot is strikingly similar to that of "Come Live With Me," a charming '40s classic starring Jimmy Stewart, with Hedy Lamarr similarly playing herself as a Viennese refugee.

The bittersweet conclusion to "Green Card" is appropriate and very French, but may prove something of a surprise to Americans seeking purely escapist entertainment. For those wanting to know more about the great Depardieu without reading subtitles, this is the perfect introduction.

'Silence of Lambs' thrills with psychotic psychiatrist

By John Mabry

In Jonathan Demme's psychological thriller "Silence of the Lambs," based on the novel of the same name, veteran British actor Anthony Hopkins creates what may well be one of the most memorable madmen in recent cinema history.

Hopkins is Dr. Hannibal (Hannibal the Cannibal) Lecter, a psychiatrist with a passion for Dvorak — and devouring his patients.

Hopkins, with a true Truman Capote-like wit and style, latches onto the dichotomy with perfectly nasty ease. Although his psyche is masked by an intensely cool and charming outer shell, audiences will never once forget that it houses the innards of a bloodthirsty demon who describes eating a census taker's liver "with some fava beans and a nice chianti."

Hopkins is, in the course of two hours, terrifying, abhorrent, elegant and funny; and so becomes the hero of the film — the killer you hate to love.

Lecter's perfect alter-ego is F.B.I. intern Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), who has been recruited to visit Lecter in his high-security cell to solicit his understandably expert advice on a serial-killer case.

Starling, unlike Lecter, is undeniably honest, grounded in reality. Although Hopkins is behind bars (or glass, rather), she is putty in his brilliantly manipulative hands.

Not surprisingly, Foster once again shows she

is one of America's best straight actresses. Like Hopkins, Foster shows herself capable of playing a psychologically complex, real person, as she did for her Oscar-winning role in 1988's "The Accused." Foster, newly dark-haired for the part, manages to simultaneously play the reserved, immutable exterior and the vulnerable, weak little girl "with second-hand shoes" that she attempts to cloak. Her description of a traumatic childhood experience, a sexual turn-on for Hopkins, is especially poignant.

Together they manage to create a most unusual and surprisingly touching psychological love affair in their wonderfully intense scenes together.

During one of their cat-and-mouse sessions, Starling discovers that Lecter not only understands the killer (dubbed "Buffalo Bill" for his penchant for skinning his female victims), but he knows him.

With this startling information, Foster and the F.B.I. hound the elusive Hopkins for more information — all the while Buffalo Bill, a.k.a. Jame Gumb, has struck again.

This time he has kidnapped a senator's daughter and is going through the ritual of starving his size-14 victim to loosen her skin for his rather irregular taste in boots and clothing.

While Hopkins is a coiled spring, Gumb,

played by Ted Levine, is a tormented wildcat. His performance is highly sexual and uncontrollable, and although he is nowhere near as menacing as Dr. Lecter, he adds a physical perversity that keeps the film from being all mindgames.

Up until the film's brilliantly macabre one-liner finale, "Silence of the Lambs" is a highly engaging, sometimes horrifying, puzzle-piece thriller that keeps a discrete balance between the mental and the monstrous.

Most of the film operates at high voltage, with Demme giving the audiences a few rest stops in between. The suspense is enhanced by his use of several mind-teasing cutting effects that keep you hopelessly drifting between suspense and relief.

"Silence of the Lambs" also is, not surprisingly, violent. In a movie dealing with this subject matter, blood and guts are unavoidable. Demme does, however, keep most of the ketchup bottles in the refrigerator. Keep in mind that the real fear Demme tries to create, in true Hitchcock fashion, is what is inside your imagination.

Lots of animal imagery, stark visual contrasts and harsh lighting enhance the film's haunting subject matter and prove Demme to be a director with an eye for theme and detail.

Should film-goers decide to devour "Lambs," they will surely walk away on a full stomach.