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*'Used People' a miracle of humor and truth*

By JENNY MAGEE

*The Battalion*

**"Used People"**

Starring Shirley MacLaine, Marcello Mastroianni, Kathy Bates, Jessica Tandy, and Marcia Gay Harden

Directed by Beeban Kidron  
 Rated PG-13  
 Playing at Post Oak 3

"Used People," a newly released comedy-drama, is a captivating movie about miracles. Not the monumental, earth-shattering kind, just the unexpected surprises that wash away the hardened edges that covered up hope.

Pearl (Shirley MacLaine) has just buried her husband, Jack, after nearly 40 years of marriage. After the funeral, the thoughts of life on her own, not to mention the headache of trying to survive a house full of relatives, send Pearl into her bedroom to escape.

And in walks Joe Meledandri (Marcello Mastroianni), an older version of Romeo, intent on winning Pearl over with his prolific quotations of love. He even invites the bewildered Pearl — in the presence of her entire eccentric family — out for coffee. With a smug little sniffle, Pearl's mother (Jessica Tandy) announces in convicted disbelief that her daughter has been picked up at her own husband's funeral.

This is not exactly the case. When Jack had been on the verge of leaving Pearl 23 years before, Joe convinced him to stay and work through the problems. But Joe's first glimpse of Pearl sent him plummeting into the grip of obsession, and now he has walked into her life, determined to rescue her with his love.

If the story of "Used People," with all its subtle humor and truth, was not enough to produce a work of considerable merit, English director Beeban Kidron assembled some powerful Hollywood heavyweights for the cast.

Academy Award winners Jessica Tandy, Shirley MacLaine, and Kathy Bates certainly provide the film with the kind of quality acting that is the product of nurtured experience.

MacLaine is incredible in the role of Pearl. Not only has she perfected the brash New York Jewish humor, but she has used the aftermath of a life of unfulfilled dreams to create a timeless character of the "pre-modern" woman.

There are still a lot of women today who remember a time when they were expected to settle for mediocrity. MacLaine's understanding of this gives Pearl obvious depth.

The story centers on Pearl. The progression of the plot allows her character to be colored in



Marcello Mastroianni (center) and (clockwise from upper left) Shirley MacLaine, Kathy Bates, Jessica Tandy and newcomer Marcia Gay Harden star in the comedic drama "Used People."

the fullest detail. The other characters are integral to the action and provide the movie with vital depth, but only as accents to Pearl's story.

All too often movies seem to shy away from characters that cannot reach full development. "Used People" handles the integration of this sort of supporting character surprisingly well.

The film introduces Marcia Gay Harden, a 1980 graduate of the University of Texas, in the role of Pearl's youngest daughter, Norma, and she adds a breath of fresh air amidst the collection of veterans.

Norma's obsession with dressing up as movie stars, as a method of coping with life after burying her infant years before, represents the sort of pathetic humor that is both characteristic of the movie and of life.

For most college students, it is still hard to imagine that life will serve up anything less than a fairy tale. That is why watching Pearl and Joe fall in love at 60-something can seem unthinkable, scary, and beautiful all at the same time to a college-age viewer.

"Used People" is in one sense a tragic picture of the deterioration of youth, but in another sense, it beats Cinderella by a mile as far as true romance is concerned.

Falling in love in the height of beauty and vitality is incredible, but when people find love after they were certain that life had used it all up, it is nothing short of a miracle.

Movie-goers are lucky that occasionally movies like "Used People" come along that bring back faith in miracles.

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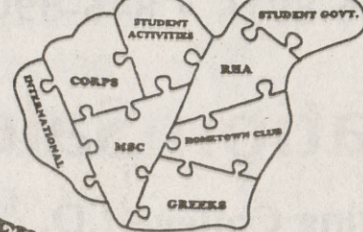
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