

## The Year in Film

BY MATT MCCORMICK  
The Battalion

Movies are big business, but in 1999 they were as big as they come. There were more than 15 blockbusters — movies that gross over \$100 million at the box office — which is unusually high for a single year. Yet the financial success of these movies is not as impressive as the number of high quality releases that will forever change the way movies are made and viewed.

Teen films reached new heights in '99 with a number of extremely smart comedies. Studio execs normally seemed to realize that the teenagers can be funny, and do not have to be reduced to being objects for a serial killer to slice and dice for an hour and a half. Teen films grew up as studios released the films with adult themes in a teen setting. Shake-pears's "The Taming of the Shrew" was redone very entertainingly in *10 Things I Hate About You*, and the delightfully wicked *Cruel Intentions* was *Dangerous Liaisons* set in high school. Even *She's Not That* owed a large debt to the classic *My Fair Lady*. Add the insightful and shocking with the biting satirical *Election*, the extremely original *Rushmore* and the explicitly vulgar yet sweet *American Pie*, and what a person gets is that this year's teen movies were among some of the most cleverly written films of the year.

The slasher/horror movie craze of recent years has finally died out only to be replaced with the supernatural thriller. The biggest of these supernatural thrillers was *The Sixth Sense*, which has broken into the list of the top 12 highest grossing movies of all time. Creepy and intelligent, this film is sure to attract Oscar buzz at the very least for the young, brilliant Haley Joel Osment. Of

course, something must be said about *The Blair Witch Project*, even if it isn't good. The movie itself was not worth the attention, but the way in which it was marketed via the internet and the amount of pre-release hype that was generated must be credited with its amazing profit ratio. Sold as an independent film made for around \$30,000 dollars, this film took in over \$135 million at the box office, showing that independent movies can gain mainstream success. Against the staggering success of these two films, it must be noted that not all supernatural thrillers came up winners. Dull and dreary, *The Haunting's* only saving grace was the extensive use of Catherine Zeta-Jones for eye candy. This coupled with the poor performance of other films like *Stigmata* and *Stir of Echoes* put a damper on the explosion. However, due to the overall success of the genre, it should be expected that a flood of supernatural thrillers will probably be released until that market burns itself out.

What about the action movies? Maybe a better question would be where were the action movies? Traditionally, action films are expected to carry the heavy load of the summer blockbuster season. However, only *Deep Blue Sea* and *Wild Wild West* were the only summer releases that could qualify for action. Wait a second. *Deep Blue Sea* was a shark movie. But under the skillful watch of action auteur Renny Harlin, this movie makes for a great action flick. The only thing that can be said about *Wild Wild West* is that hopefully Will Smith will stay away from such future projects. The year's only other big action movies both opened out of season during the spring and enjoyed a large amount of success. *The Matrix* was one of the most visually stunning movies in cinema history, yet despite the pulse-pounding action sequences, this film is more science fiction than action movie. In a similar line of

reasoning, *The Mummy* is another movie that is more adventure than action, yet seems to have found success crossing the genres. Bond returned to the screen in the fall as Pierce Brosnan took his third crack at playing 007. *The World is Not Enough* was mediocre action at best — hardly

**Audiences could once again believe in fairy tales of love and wish they could be in the movies.**

what one expects from "the granddaddy of all action movies." Action films may have been absent this year by for the most part, but never fear, next year should have a larger selection.

What could any review of the year in film be without a mention of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*? Hyped beyond all belief, people waited in line for tickets weeks in advance of the film's release. Some even quit their jobs to be among the first in the nation to view the newest addition to the classic saga. However, opinions about the film were split. Some thought it was great, while others thought it was horrible. Clearly, while the computer graphic images in this film was exceptional, George Lucas should have spent a little less time focusing on the technical aspects of the film and a little more on the characters and the story.

1999 also saw some edgy and controversial releases as well. One may look no further than *Fight Club* to see one of the boldest and imaginative films of all time. The film's dark and gritty look

at violence as a way of release and its twisted sense of humor turned off many, but it has one of the most surprising endings in the history of film (Yes, even more surprising than *The Sixth Sense*). Another risk-taker was *Three Kings*, which mixed and crossed genres. Yet another memorable, ground breaking movie was *American Beauty*. Kevin Spacey displayed his uncanny gift for deadpan in one of the years most engaging and shocking films, and barring some tragedy, he should get an Oscar nod for his efforts. *Being John Malkovich* and *Dogma* round out the unique and original category. These films dared to transcend genres and did not worry about trying to appeal to everyone in the audience, but instead chose to rely on the strength of their stories and the performances of their stars to lift them above the crowd. Hollywood deserves a standing ovation for allowing films like this to be released, and hopefully will allow more of these films to cross into mainstream.

Romantic comedies this year also reached new levels of excellence as Julia Roberts proved that she is a superstar with her summer "double shot" of *Notting Hill* and *Runaway Bride*. Kevin Costner finally scored a hit with *For Love of the Game*, but unfortunately no one seemed to pay to see it. These films stood out because of the amazing humanity displayed in all the characters. Audiences could once again believe in fairy tales of love and honestly wish they could be the ones in the movies.

There were also memorable dramas, including

such stirring winners as *The Green Mile* and the superbly crafted *Instinct*, this year's dramas achieved new heights in movie-making excellence. With the addition of this year's serious Oscar contenders in *The Hurricane* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as well as *Snow Falling on Cedars* this year belongs to the actors and the actresses who made these movies possible. By once again daring to focus more on making the film than on making a budget, studios demonstrated that there are still a few good films left.

Part of the reason for such a high quality year in film was due to the cooperation between studios which has become exceedingly popular in the past two years. By studios splitting production costs, it has made it easier for studio execs not to sell their films short on quality while saving a dollar.

There have been other good movies this year, but it would be impossible to cover all of them in the above space.

Hopefully, those mentioned have exemplified the changing shift in the movie industry and offer insight into the direction in which it is headed. In 1999, movies have set a bold new standard for entertainment, and it will be interesting to see how the films in 2000 hold up.



## OPAS brings collection of Webber's Broadway hits

BY KELLY PREISER  
The Battalion

From beneath the stage of a Paris opera house to the streets of Argentina, MSC OPAS's presentation of "The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber" will take audiences through the vast and varied works of one of the world's most acclaimed composers.

The program, which will kick off OPAS's spring season, strings together songs from Webber's hit Broadway musicals including "The Phantom of the Opera," "Evita," "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "Cats."

"[The show] will start OPAS off on a really fine note," Paul Parish, president of MSC OPAS said, "[and it has arrived] before we all get too particularly busy with work and school."

Webber is a world-famous composer who has received numerous awards including six Tony Awards, and three Grammys. He also received a Golden Globe and an Oscar for Best Original Song for the soundtrack from the film version of "Evita."

"If you haven't seen any Andrew Lloyd Webber productions, this is

your chance to get a large dose of one of the greatest assets to Broadway," Michael Saucier, director of publicity and advertising for MSC OPAS, said.

Saucier said Webber's incorporation of different genres of music, ranging from classic opera to rock 'n' roll, makes his musicals enjoyable for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Saucier said there are still other reasons why OPAS selected it.

"[OPAS] chose [The Music of] Andrew Lloyd Webber as one of our performances this year because of all the incredible music that this man has composed and also that there is a huge amount of people who know, love and appreciate his music," Jeremy Byrd, chair of OPAS and a senior psychology major, said.

"Secondly, it is always important to us that we bring music that will allow our student body to experience music in a moving and exciting performance... Webber does that and more."

MSC OPAS will present The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber on Saturday and Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$13.50 to \$38 for students and \$27 to \$45 for non-students.

## News in brief Destiny's Child to perform Saturday

Destiny's Child, a female pop/R&B group, will be stopping in College Station Saturday night to perform at G. Rolie White Colosseum. The group is being brought to Texas A&M as a part of the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC). Destiny's Child is known for such hits as "Bills, Bills Bills".

"We chose to bring Destiny's Child because they are a younger group and have had a lot of success," April Reed, a junior journalism major and entertainment chair for SBSLC, said.

The concert starts at 9 p.m. Saturday night with an after party in Reed Arena.

Nominate someone special for Aggie Parents of the Year

Attend one of the following mandatory informational meetings

Monday, January 24  
Tuesday, January 25  
Wednesday, January 26  
Monday, February 3

at 8:30 p.m., in Rudder 203

If you have any questions, please call Lauren with Parents' Weekend Committee at 845-3051

**BookPriceScan.com**

Don't you HATE paying high prices for TEXTBOOKS? We're here to help you find the best deal on ALL your books, and we DON'T care who you buy from.

We'll link you directly to several book-price COMPARISON sites and dozens of book-store sites. BOOK ADS, BULLETINS, SALES, AUCTIONS and anything you or anyone else wants to help the rest of us! ALL FREE of course!

It's VERY VERY easy, so check us out and tell your friends. Return those overpriced books SILLY!

Got Art?

Here is your chance to study and create art in Dealy, the birth place of the Renaissance.

Italy Summer Session I 2000  
ARTS 205: Painting I  
(A Creative Course in Drawing and Water Color Media)  
Prof Joe Hutchinson  
and  
ARTS 350: The Arts and Civilization  
Prof Paolo Baruccchieri and Prof Joe Hutchinson

Earn six TAMU credits while having one of the greatest experiences of your life!

Contact the Study Abroad Program Office  
161 Bizell Hall West  
845-0544

or  
Professor Joe Hutchinson  
jmhutch@tamu.edu  
845-0584

Spots are limited, Contact us today!!!