

'Aphrodite' Epitomizes Allen's New Style

Woody Allen's films have undergone two major changes since he made his directorial debut thirty-one years ago with "Take the Money and Run." In 1977, after he won the Best Director Oscar for "Annie Hall," he changed. His next film, "Interiors," ushered in a new era of introspective, quiet and more "serious" films. These films varied from pure tragedy ("September") to sublimely funny, but all of them retained a sense of hopelessness or reluctant acceptance of man's minuscule position in the world. However, after "Shadows and Fog" and "Husbands and Wives" received especially wide critical acclaim in the early nineties, the ball dropped. With controversies surrounding him and his adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn, he retreated into obscurity, returning only to act in "Scenes From a Marriage" and direct the cream-puff "Manhattan Murder Mystery."

TODD GILCHRIST
Movie Review
'Mighty Aphrodite'
B+

"Murder Mystery" indicated yet another change for America's most curious auteur: Allen as the matinee master. There are noticeable differences in these subsequent films from their predecessors; they are decidedly less serious, extend past Allen's previous repertoire of contemporary New York stories ("Bullets Over Broadway") and are far detached from his personal life. His latest film, "Mighty Aphrodite," strengthens this trend. "Mighty Aphrodite" re-invents the traditional Greek chorus as a framework for this tale of the relationships between men and women and then turns it on its ear. Led by F. Murray Abraham, the chorus begins with a classic recitation of Greek verse and then soon updates its shtick, giving advice to the other, more contemporary characters and helping the story along. Allen returns to his leading-man position as Lenny, a sportswriter who reluctantly (at least at first) decides to adopt a child with his wife, Amanda (Helena Bonham

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Carter), an art-gallery manager whose relationship needs a little kick.

Several years later, the excitement of child rearing has worn off, leaving Lenny and Amanda in a lackluster relationship, held together only by their affection for their son, Max. Lenny sees happy couples walking on the street and wonders why they aren't the same; Amanda's main concern is opening her own art gallery, assisted by Jerry Bender, another gallery owner eager to get her out of her clothes.

Looking for solace, Lenny decides to find the birth mother of his adopted son, and much to his dismay, she is a veteran porn star and prostitute who at one time worked under the name Judy Cum. When he meets her, she is using the name Linda and turning tricks out of her apartment. After an initial meeting in which he can barely resist submitting to his carnal desires, he decides that he wants to help her make her life better, even if she isn't interested.

Lenny and Linda begin seeing each other with an unnatural regularity, even though their relationship is platonic, as Amanda and Jerry begin an affair in which she barely can find herself involved. Lenny sets up Linda with Kevin (Michael Rapaport), a dimwitted prizefighter who aspires to work on his brother's onion farm, not battle Tyson. Then the story gets complicated.

All of the performances are terrific, except for Helena Bonham Carter's harried, pale Amanda, who isn't especially believable. Woody Allen is

great as Lenny, even if he's doing his classic routine, and Mira Sorvino is excellent in the dumb-blonde Linda role. Previously in cinematic nephew Whit Stillman's "Barcelona" and "Quiz Show," she carries the role into something substantial, leaving the audience with more than a one-note character whose physique is the only memorable thing about the performance.

F. Murray Abraham, a grossly underrated and underused actor, won an Oscar 10 years ago for his performance in "Amadeus" and has been neglected ever since. His Chorus Leader is funny, inquisitive, intelligent and much like Lenny, he occasionally lets his emotions get the best of his logic. Michael Rapaport, who was abused in "Higher Learning" and shone in "Kiss Of Death," is perfect as Kevin. Rapaport seems to be getting typecast as a tough-but-dumb Northerner, because every role he has performed since his debut in "Zebrahead" has played upon this, but he is still incredible, conveying equal parts toughness and discomfort in a role that should get him noticed by more than the most extreme film buffs.

The only problem with "Aphrodite" is that it epitomizes Allen's new style. He is reluctant to write with the intensity he once did and this seems to be out of the fear that parallels will be drawn between his films and his life. At the same time, Allen doesn't want to appear to be glorifying himself, so he balances all of his characters' positives and negatives.

When Amanda has an affair with Jerry, we feel sorry for Lenny, which could be construed as making Lenny perfect, so Lenny gives in and has an affair with Linda. Doing this makes the characters realistic, but it also leaves the audience wondering why his character would make this sudden change.

Still leagues above every other comedy this year in terms of wit and sheer intelligence, "Mighty Aphrodite" only falters when it calls attention to its avoidance of Allen's personal publicity.

'When Nature Calls,' Ace Ventura Returns to Deliver More Laughs

Some people like to go to movies looking for a message about society. Others like going to see their favorite actors or actresses.

But if you want to go to a movie that will make you laugh the entire time you are in the theater, go see "Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls."

"Ace 2" is the sequel to the popular "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective," starring Jim Carrey, arguably the funniest person on the face of the planet. Ace is a pompadoured pet detective who people hire to find their missing pets. He is the Doctor Doolittle of the '90s.

In this film, we find Ace in a Tibetan monastery trying to find his "inner self" after being unable to save a raccoon on a snow-covered mountain in a hilarious scene reminiscent of "Cliffhanger." He is hired to find a sacred white bat that was stolen from a Nibian tribe in Africa. The mystery Ace has to solve is: who took the bat? Was it the rival tribe, poachers or someone else? Of course, Ace goes through many hilarious misadventures while finding the bat. He rides through a forest singing "Chitty-chitty-bang-bang" in a range rover, spits on tribal leaders, drives a camouflaged monster truck through a wall of rock, busts up a high society gathering, elbow-smashes an alligator, goes through tribal initiation rituals and is hit countless times with poison darts, among other things.

"Ace 2," written and directed by comic Steve Oedekerk, uses the template for a great comedy sequel. It keeps the best aspects of the original and uses the same formula, but it also adds a lot of new aspects that are better and funnier than the original. The same Ace catch phrases are in the sequel, including "like a glove," "leh-hew, seh-her" and "all righty, then."

The film is literally nothing, though, without Carrey.

BRIAN TRUITT
Movie Review
'Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls'
A

"Ace 1" is what put him on the celebrity map, and here he returns to what made him famous. For the last year-and-a-half, he has done no wrong, starring in hits like "The Mask," "Dumb and Dumber" and "Batman Forever," and he is now an actor who can command \$20 million per movie.

It is obvious he has not sold out yet. He is great in "Ace 2." The plot is enhanced (and made) by Carrey's physical comedy. In certain places, Oedekerk just lets him go off and have fun, which is the smartest thing to do when you have someone like Carrey. The Ace persona is his baby, and he treats it as such during the movie; Ace is a lunatic who has a good heart and does his best to save animals in trouble, but he will still strut into an African village wearing a Hawaiian shirt and tacky pants.

The only significant oversight and the main departure from the original is the lack of more star power around Carrey. In "Ace 1," Carrey co-starred with Courteney Cox, Sean Young, Ice-T and Dan Marino. Even with these actors and actresses, Carrey stole the movie.

The producers of the sequel may have thought that he might be overshadowed by other stars, but with Carrey's personality, it is highly unlikely. The only actor in the cast that most people may have heard of before is Tommy Davidson.

Davidson, one of Carrey's co-stars on the late television series "In Living Color," plays a brief role as a tiny tribal warrior whom Ace has to fight in order to become a member of the tribe.

Overall, "Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls" is a great movie and one that all ages will love. If you have not seen the original, you may want to check it out before seeing the new one because it's also hilarious. Take your girlfriend, take your boyfriend, take a friend or just take yourself, but go see it; you will laugh your head off. All righty, then ...

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WALTER SALAS-HUMARA... radar
The nexus of the band SILO, Salas-Humara fuses his oblique story-telling with the gamut of guitar styles, some deliciously noisy, others gloriously beautiful on "Radar," his second solo effort.

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TONIO K... life in the foodchain
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ROBERT EARL KEEN... gringo honeymoon
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