

Holiday movies diverse

By TOM MOORE
DTH Staff Writer

Christmas is the time for peace on earth and good will toward men. Christmas is the time for family feasts and neighborhood caroling. Christmas is the time for midnight church services and stockings hung by the chimney with care. But most importantly, Christmas is the time for the biggest commercial boom of the whole year. As Tom Lehrer's "Christmas Carol" says, "God rest ye merry merchants, may ye make the Yuletide pay."

At Christmas it seems everyone has something to sell. The American film industry, which bases its existence on commercial booms, is no exception. Each year, the happy holidays see the release of several colossal extravaganzas that the studios hope will be box-office smashes. Most of these stupendous big events turn out to be instantly forgettable.

But many of this year's Christmas film releases may be exceptions to this time-proven rule. But this seems to be something I say every year.

The most promising release this Christmas is Warren Beatty's *Reds*, one of the most serious films ever attempted by Hollywood. *Reds* is the story of John Reed, the Harvard-educated journalist who documented the 1917 Russian Revolution

in his book *Ten Days That Shook the World* and was instrumental in starting the U.S. Communist Party. In many ways, *Reds* is the most conventional of the Yuletide pictures; it apparently presents Reed's leftist odyssey in the grand terms of such wide-screen epics as *Dr. Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. *Reds* also seems conventional because, like so many "true account" films, it centers around Reed's love affair with the equally-bohemian Louise Bryant.

But any film about early American radicalism can hardly be that conventional. At a cost of between \$30 and \$50 million and a running time of 3 hours, 20 minutes, *Reds* is a big risk. The film, which stars Beatty, Diane Keaton, Jack Nicholson, Maureen Stapleton and Gene Hackman, has opened to good notices from critics.

Ragtime, Milos Forman's adaptation of the popular E. L. Doctorow novel, like *Reds* deals with leftist politics in the early 20th century. It mixes the factual and the fictional in its sweeping tale of a younger and more energetic America. The film has gotten mixed reviews, but some critics — most notably old acid-tongue herself, Pauline Kael — have found it pretty awful.

The general consensus holds that the film is much less enjoyable than the novel, that Forman was too tame with the material and that he didn't

bring to it the certain wackiness and sympathy it deserves. Still, any film with Norman Mailer, Mary Steenburgen and Brad Dourif that features a score by Randy Newman is bound to be interesting. That James Cagney, the most kinetic of all screen actors, is starring in his first film in 20 years makes *Ragtime* a must-see. Even Pauline admits that he's great.

Thomas Berger is the funniest novelist in America, and his book *Neighbors*, a Kafkaesque look at feuding suburbanites, is a comic masterpiece. John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd star in the film version, directed by John Alvidsen (*Rocky*). While there is no advance word on the film, with material as good as Berger's it would be hard to go wrong.

Chevy Chase, another *Saturday Night Live* alumnus, stars in *Modern Problems*, a film about an air traffic controller with supernatural powers. Not much else is known about this comedy, which also features Mary Kay Place and Brian-Doyle Murray; it is the first feature directed by Ken Shapiro, who was responsible for the popular *Groove Tube* compilation film.

Steve Martin, whose career was also boosted by *Saturday Night Live*, stars in *Pennies From Heaven*, certainly the weirdest of all movies this Christmas. *Pennies*, based on a recent BBC series, is a homage to those lavish Busby Berkeley musi-

icals of the 1930s. Martin plays a song-sheet salesman who lives in a musical fantasy world. Bernadette Peters, Christopher Walken and Jessica Harper also appear in this film, directed by Herbert Ross. All the actors lip-synch their numbers to old songs by the likes of Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong.

Another comedy being released this Christmas is *Buddy Buddy*. Directed by Billy Wilder, it stars Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. Lemmon plays a television censor who is contemplating suicide since his wife has run off with a sex therapist she interviewed for "60 Minutes." Lemmon checks into a hotel room next door to a Mafia hit man, Matthau. *Buddy Buddy*, which also features Paula Prentiss and Klaus "Aguire" Kinski, sounds like a black comedy reminiscent of *Some Like It Hot* and *The Apartment*. But so did *Fedora*.

Two of this year's Yuletide films are based on recent plays — *On Golden Pond* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* *On Golden Pond*, judging by the reviews, is one of those crusty-old-man-who-can't-communicate-with-his-daughter movies. It is redeemed, however, by strong acting by Henry Fonda, Katherine Hepburn and Jane Fonda. It's sure to be the big Oscar-grabber next spring, if that means anything to you. If you like movies, it shouldn't.

'Absence of Malice'

Film probes ethics

By JULIAN KARCHMER
DTH Staff Writer

With *Absence of Malice*, director Sydney Pollack has again effectively probed the frailty of ethical codes weakened by large, abstract organizations.

Past Pollack films *Three Days of the Condor* and *The Electric Horseman* were concerned with the "system" and its tangled web of evils. *Absence of Malice* pursues similar lines, although it is not so blatant in attacking the organization itself as the basis for an individual's moral behavior.

cinema

This movie's setting is the contemporary newsroom, and the theme is journalistic responsibility vs. business and personal enterprise. On the one hand, the newspaper seeks to make a profit, no longer an easy task for the troubled fourth estate. So selling newspapers to a public deserving and eager for news occasionally includes stretching facts and, at times, writing just within the confines of libel law. On the other hand, fulfilling the public trust can contradict this profit-making initiative.

Since the legendary Watergate successes of Woodward and Bernstein, investigative journalists have increasingly been stressing the big scoop. But ethics largely seem to be falling by the wayside like so many dominoes in this search for the big story. Constitutional freedom of the press has slowly developed into a disturbing holier-than-thou attitude well represented in *Absence of Malice*.

The film mirrors actual, disturbing events in recent journalism. One cannot help but think of recent headlines: the *London Times'* financial problems, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning story being discovered a fake and celebrities taking the supermarket bird-cage tabloids to court for slander. The print media must now, perhaps more than ever, inspect itself. *Absence of Malice* covers this introspec-

tion at the most basic level, the staff writer on the beat, and manages to bring this lofty, didactic subject matter down to an enjoyable form.

The film offers a refreshing, but still one-sided, view of journalism. Old, romantic movies show young, hard-working reporters discovering the corruption of the world and heroically printing stories for all to read. But as scripted by former journalist Kurt Luedtke, *Absence of Malice* portrays the newspaper as the focus of impropriety, not romanticism.

Sally Field plays Miami reporter Megan Carter. Field's rebellious, spirited screen persona again makes her character click. Carter writes a shoddy story linking an innocent man, Michael Gallagher (Paul Newman) to the Jimmy Hoffa-type disappearance of a union boss. It isn't long before the logs start to roll over Gallagher and his friends, one of whom commits suicide over a story Carter later prints. Hollywood has rarely viewed the press in such a negative context.

Yet while we are led to experience the tremendous power of printed word, the plot surprisingly resolves to an ironic conclusion. People outside the press actually manipulate the press to their own advantage by understanding current principles of journalism.

For once, newspapers come out looking terrible, and rightly so considering the presentation it receives in *Absence of Malice*. But despite its natural appeal, the film has its faults, especially at the end, when the unbelievably idealistic Carter is suddenly enlightened to the ways of her profession.

Also stereotypes are often disturbing in this film, especially in the character of Carter, who will do anything to get a story, even sleeping with a source. Female reporters, admittedly a refreshing, new presence in film, were constantly presented as victims of sexual harassment, their sources making proposition after proposition during professional interviews.

Absence of Malice opens nationally Dec. 18.

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"Since no formal risk was involved for us, I agreed," owner-manager Art Chansky of Four Corners restaurant said. "It didn't constitute a change in our menu." The specials designated for Follies members were daily specials available to all customers, usually free, non-alcoholic beverages offered with a meal.

The Consumer Protection Division of the N.C. Department of Justice has made no progress in the investigation. "We have not done anything yet," Consumer Protection Specialist Billie Holcombe said.

Benefit slated

A benefit spaghetti supper for the Hemophilia Foundation is scheduled for 5-8 p.m. Saturday at the Carolina Grill, West Franklin Street.

The supper will provide all-you-can-eat spaghetti, salad, bread and tea or coffee for \$3.50.

The Hemophilia Foundation is a non-profit organization.

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SHS — Xmas closing

Because Student Health Services has treated few students on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in past years, SHS will be closed over Christmas this year, SHS Director Judith Cowan said Wednesday.

While SHS is closed—10 p.m. Dec 23 to 7 a.m. Dec. 26—students with serious health problems should use the N.C. Memorial Hospital emergency room, Cowan said.

But, SHS fees will pay for services that would have normally been covered by the health service. If students incur costs, they should discuss billing at the time of service, she said.

"Indeed, we would cover any charge they incur over there if these are things we usually cover," Cowan said. "We want to be sure students can get where they need to go under those circumstances."

Cowan said the SHS decided to close this year for financial purposes. "It would be much more cost-effective if we could provide service through the NCMH emergency room."

Lofgren's new album cluttered

By ED LEITCH
DTH Staff Writer

Is your record collection sadly lacking in the "Take This You Bitch" rock department?

If such a deficiency exists and you're compelled to fill it, buy some Aerosmith. When Nils Lofgren tries to strike a heartbreaker pose or sound cocky on his latest release, *Night Fades Away*, the listener might have to fight off chuckle fits.

The lyrics of "Streets Again," written by Lofgren and the producer of this album, Jeffrey Baxter, are particularly distinctive. One might think Baxter was a bad influence on Lofgren simply because of the production of *Night Fades Away*, which is extremely cluttered and dirty. The lyrics of the songs Baxter co-wrote are equally cluttered and dirty.

Of course, there is more to *Night Fades Away* than banal sex tracks and contrived sneering. For example,

the cover photo of Lofgren is very nice. It was taken by Anne Leibovitz of *Rolling Stone*, who always does a fine job.

Also, Nicky Hopkins plays some interesting keyboards on "Ancient History." In that tune, Nils finds himself on the receiving end (my baby's left me—a novel theme) and seems confused and perturbed about her bitchiness.

If Lofgren would simply put together a loose framework of rhythm instruments and decorate it with a tasteful amount of lead, there's no doubt he could come up with an engaging tune. That sort of thing works well on his live albums. But here he is all too concerned with images and striking a pose. Lofgren should exploit some of that flash guitar work with a minimum of electronic garbage mixed in and leave the images to Thoreau. If Lofgren did that, he and his listeners would have an album of which they could be proud.

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