

Films have Disney's magic touch

By JEFF GROVE
Arts Editor

Thanks to the complexities of booking films in a town with as few screens as Chapel Hill, Walt Disney Pictures' Christmas package has only now arrived.

The company's new featurette, *Mickey's Christmas Carol*, is but a qualified success. The studio's decision to issue the new film on a double bill with a re-release of *The Rescuers*, however, should ensure it an audience.

Mickey's Christmas Carol is a 26-minute adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, with Charles Dickens' characters played by familiar critters from the Disney stable.

Some of the "casting" decisions are obvious: Ebenezer Scrooge could only be played by Scrooge McDuck, and Bob Cratchit provides an excellent vehicle for Mickey Mouse — the rodent's first screen appearance since a 1953 short cartoon called *The Simple Things*.

Other ideas for characters display more evidence of thought. For example, since memories of the past often bring on twinges of remorse over things left un-

done, Jimmy Cricket, the conscience of the title character in *Pinocchio*, is a nicely symbolic choice for the role of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

One blatant miscalculation, however, is the choice of Goofy as the ghost of Jacob Marley. Clumsy as usual, even in death, Goofy is simply not frightening enough — not frightening at all — to give Scrooge (and the audience) the shivers.

As far as art direction and animation are concerned, *Mickey's Christmas Carol* is a total victory. The gray, snow-blanketed London streets and houses may not be strictly Dickensian, but they somehow seem appropriate in this rendering.

Certainly the Disney crew offers no dearth of striking visual images. The graveyard scene, where Scrooge learns the fate that awaits him should his ways remain unchanged, is far too frightening for young children to bear. Unlike traditional renderings of the scene, this version presents Scrooge with his own open grave. His coffin belches fire and brimstone as the earth shakes. A hellishly gleaming match illuminates his tombstone.

Irwin Kostal's musical underscoring deserves mention. Kostal, who won Oscars for his work on *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music* and who arranged the songs for Disney's *Mary Poppins*, has created an original score of great charm using Victorian-style chamber music with economy.

Given the terrors of some scenes of *Mickey's Christmas Carol*, perhaps it was wise to release it coupled with *The Rescuers*.

Arguably the best animated feature-length film produced by the Disney studios without Walt Disney's personal direction, *The Rescuers* (1977) is best described as animated film noir. Both literally and figuratively a dark film, it practically drips evil off the screen in spite of some inventive touches of comedy.

This double billing allows comparisons of recent Disney animation efforts. And it's safe to say that, in spite of such disappointments as *The Fox and the Hound*, the Disney folks have not lost their magic touch.



Ebenezer Scrooge (Scrooge McDuck) gets a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Future in Disney's 'Mickey's Christmas Carol,' which opened along with 'The Rescuers' recently.

Acting, direction save silly 'Luv' story

By JO ELLEN MEEKINS
Staff Writer

Good acting and effective direction saved a basically silly storyline in the UNC Laboratory Theatre's production of Murray Schisgal's *Luv*, which was performed Sunday and Monday.

Undergraduates E. Eugene Murray, Kimball Crossley and Allison Hall portrayed three distinct characters with two things in common. All three are losers in their personal lives, but they all have one thing that sustains their will to live: "luv," the performers' abilities, combined with Michael Louden's direction, provided some genuinely funny moments in a play that is, in places, embarrassingly silly.

Luv opens with Harry Berlin (Murray) trying to jump off a bridge to kill himself. He is saved by an old school buddy, Milt Manville (Crossley), who persuades him to seek love to fill his empty life. Milt is even willing to provide a woman for Harry — his own wife, Ellen. In love with another woman, Milt is ecstatic when Harry and Ellen fall in love and want to get married. Act II, however, finds Milt and Ellen both miserable in their new marriages, wanting to remarry each other and start over.

Murray and Crossley were entertaining as two old friends who grew apart but never really grew up. Their childishness was especially obvious in their "can you top this?" sessions. Each character thinks he had the worst possible childhood. Milt

complains that he had to eat coffee grounds for breakfast, and Harry insists that he didn't know when his birthday was until he got his draft notice. Crossley's marching and singing as he relived his drum-major days and Murray playing with knives as if they were swords were also funny scenes.

Hall's characterization of Ellen was puzzling at first, especially when she informed Milt of the reason for the failure of their marriage via a graph she hung on a lamppost. Gradually she became more believable as she sadly expressed her disillusionment with the plight of women. Ellen needs the security of marriage and motherhood, but her photographic memory and sharp intelligence scare men away. "I'll never forgive the Board of Education for that," Ellen says angrily.

The character of Ellen in *Luv* makes a strong statement about women's and men's views of each other. One of the most memorable dialogues in the play occurs when Harry asks Ellen to make one wish. "I wish I were a lesbian," Ellen replies. Harry argues that if she were a lesbian she would have to learn how to pick up girls. Ellen answers that it would be easy: she would simply "learn to be a liar and a hypocrite."

Ellen herself represents a stereotype of women: they can be either smart or attractive to men, but not both. Ellen, like Harry and Milt, is very childlike. She and Harry show their reluctance to trust other people as they do rotten things to each other and then ask, "Do you still love

me?" Ellen is so eager to hear "I love you" that she uses her hand to make Harry's lips form the words.

Luv is about love, but although it has funny moments and a few powerful points, the play itself cannot compare with *Tootsie*, one of Schisgal's later works. *Luv* and *Tootsie* both deal with women's problems and men's and women's attitudes toward each other, but *Luv* is not as effective.

Considering what they had to work with, however, the cast and director did an excellent job.

Book schedule

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Roomful of Blues, an up-and-coming band out of Providence, R.I., will be making its debut in Chapel Hill tonight at Cat's Cradle.

Roomful of Blues to play in Cat's Cradle

By DAVID SOTOLONGO
Staff Writer

Roomful of Blues, a nine-piece band from Providence, R.I., will make its Chapel Hill debut tonight at the Cat's Cradle.

Fusing rhythm and blues with as many musical genres as it has band members, Roomful has established itself as the hottest dance band on the East Coast since New Rhythm and Blues Quartet.

Like NRBQ, the band has grown from cult status to playing to more than 1,000 fans in Washington, D.C., this past weekend, manager Bob Bell said in a telephone interview Saturday.

Bell, who doubles as sound man and T-shirt vendor, was at a loss when asked to describe the band.

"Going by what they listen to on the bus, they like just about everything," Bell said. "The band is doing a lot of New Orleans R&B right now."

Roomful first came together in 1968, but only pianist Al Copley remains

from the original band. Horns were added in 1970 when Greg Piccolo and Rich Lataille joined the group.

It was not until 1979 that Roomful made a change that may ultimately bring it national recognition. Founder Duke Robillard left the band because of personality differences, and Piccolo took over vocals. The band also added another tier of brass, which introduced 59-year-old trombonist Porky Cohen to the group.

Cohen toured with such notables as Tommy Dorsey and Artie Shaw during the big-band '50s.

Rounding out the new brass section is trumpeter Bob Enos, who joined the band in 1981.

Before the personnel change, Roomful had difficulty translating the energy of its live performances into commercially successful studio efforts. *Let's Have a Party* (1977), the band's second album, had some good dance numbers like "Okie Dokie Stomp," but the band was best known for playing back-up for the Blues Brothers' New York City

debut.

After the band change in 1979, the studio treated Roomful to three steamy recordings in succession. *Hot Little Mama* (1981) landed on many blues critics' "ten best" lists. Roomful then played backup for Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson and Big Joe Turner on their next two albums, each of which was nominated for a Grammy award.

Bell said the band is currently looking for a contract with a major record company. Last year Roomful released its first single, *Please Don't Leave*. The group is now ready to release a new album, Bell said.

After 15 years, Roomful is a new band again, he said. The group hopes this tour will convince the album-buying public that swing blues is as fun as rock 'n' roll.

"The band that exists today basically came together in 1979," Bell said. "It's blues, it's R&B from the '40s and '50s, and they throw in a few soul things, too."

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