

# 'Eating Raoul' a sick comedy with nonstop offbeat fun

By JEFF GROVE  
Arts Editor

Sick comedies can be great entertainment. *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Harold and Maude* can stand aside now to make room for a worthy addition to the genre — a film called *Eating Raoul*.

The film tells the success (?) story of Paul and Mary Bland, a straight-laced

California couple who want to open a country-style restaurant. Their dream is partly a desire to escape their apartment building, which is being overrun by rich swingers.

Their scheme to raise money for the restaurant is a killing-two-birds-with-one-stone proposition: they place an ad in a swingers' newspaper, promoting Mary as "Cruel Carla," an Amazon who for big bucks will fulfill the most bizarre sexual

fantasies. Mary leads on customers arriving at the Blands' apartment. Before their fantasies reach fulfillment, however, Paul kills them with a frying pan and takes all their money.

Things go swimmingly until Raoul, a locksmith who breaks into the houses he re-keys, discovers the scam and threatens to expose it.

The story works, and works beautifully, because Paul and Mary, like the Brewster sisters in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, see nothing wrong with what they are doing. Mary innocently rationalizes the murders

by saying that she and her husband are getting rid of a bunch of sex perverts, and who's going to miss those sickos, anyway? Aside from their murder-for-profit business, the Blands' lifestyle is stifling in its correctness — they don't drink to excess, they eschew profanity and they sleep in separate beds.

Credit for the film's success must be spread equally among the four leading performers. Paul Bartel and Mary Woronov hit it off perfectly as the prudish Blands. Film newcomer Robert Beltran has a field day with the somewhat stereotypical role

of Raoul. Add to these a perfectly relaxed performance by Susan Sailer as Doris the Dominatrix, who helps Paul and Mary set up and pull off their scam, and the result is a team of performers who fit the ins and outs of characterization and comic timing to their own insanely funny purposes.

The script, written by Bartel with Richard Blackburn, carefully sets up the situation and usually keeps track of its comic purpose. The one major failure in this respect is a drawn-out sequence set at a swingers' party, which comes complete with a hot tub. Not only does the sequence fail to contribute anything to the development of the plot or characterizations, but it also features only one really good gag.

Most of the time, though, the story unfolds at the right pace, and crams in plenty of laughs along the way. The vignettes involving the Blands' customers for in-

stance, are priceless. There are a middle-aged man with a severe Oedipus complex, a neo-Nazi who's into torture, a cartoon fan who wants to chase Minnie Mouse, a tripped-out hippie with a rape fantasy, and even a midget with a Great Dane.

An even funnier sequence features Paul, at his shyest, attempting to buy some items from the thoroughly obnoxious proprietor of a sleazy adult novelty shop.

In addition to writing and acting in the film, Bartel also directs. In this kind of comedy, the director's major hurdle is organizing the lead players and the many bit performers into a tightly knit ensemble. Bartel manages this with little or no effort.

His reward — and the audience's — is a mad, witty and, of course, sick film that provides almost two hours of nonstop, offbeat fun.

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