

Catch your Brecht: it's hard to keep a great writer down



Good Woman of Szechuan, a spicy allegorical tale, was given an exotic Chinese setting by Bertolt Brecht who believed the province of 200 million was a small village. It's at the Vanier College Dining Hall, Feb. 4-7. Pictured left: Lynda Hockley and Peter Gallagher. Below: (l-r) Linda Hockley, Michelle Francis, Chris McKee, Ian Kelso, Peter Gallagher.



Radio Days is a nice tribute but it isn't one of Woody Allen's best

By KEVIN PASQUINO

I'll confess my bias right now: I love Woody Allen films and when the opportunity arose to see his latest, *Radio Days*, I jumped at the chance. Admittedly, I was set for something wonderful. This was, after all, a Woody Allen film and they're always something special.

Perhaps my expectations shouldn't have been quite so high, since the end result was a disappointed fan.

One thing is clear. Allen has made a film for a select group of people—a generation that grew up with *The Shadow*, listened to boxing matches on the radio and never realized what they were missing without television.

As a tribute to the golden age of radio, the film makes its point: radio affected people's lives and the way they perceived the world. But being a good tribute to radio isn't enough to sustain a whole film. (This could be attributed to the fact that I'm blind—or deaf, as it were—to the appeal of radio.)

Woody Allen has a unique position in North America filmmaking. He makes films year after year that never earn a lot of money, and yet he is still allowed to do exactly what he wants.

There are probably a multitude of reasons for this artistic freedom, but the two most important are probably that he makes small budget films and that it looks good when a studio releases an adult-oriented movie once in a while. More now than ever before, Woody Allen films are steadily falling into this adult-only category.

Because Woody Allen always makes small budget films, the risk involved in letting him make movies is small. But once the studios get beyond the risk of financial ruin, there is still a problem that can

emerge, and that problem is self-indulgence.

Radio Days is much like the Allen film of a couple years back, *Purple Rose of Cairo*. While *Purple Rose* looked back fondly on the golden days of cinema, *Radio Days* reminisces about the golden age of (not surprisingly) radio.

The film unfolds in two different settings, and while Woody Allen doesn't appear in the film, his narration of the events unites the two parts.

One of the settings is the home of a young Allen-esque character. Complete with parents, grandparents, aunts, an uncle and schoolhood chums, this part of the film is both funny and touching in the way it depicts family life.

Unlike two other times we've seen the Allen character as a boy (*Love and Death* and *Annie Hall*) his childhood now seems rather normal. The parents seem realistic, at least from a child's perspective, and the world doesn't seem to have neuroses lurking around the corner, waiting for little red-headed Jewish boys to walk by. This is the first time that Allen's childhood hasn't been depicted as a traumatic nightmare, and it's a nice change of pace.

The other setting for the film is the behind the scenes world of radio. This part of the movie is a potpourri of anecdotes about the people who created the air-wave voices that altered everyone's life in the 1930s and 40s.

As in the family part of the film, this part also has a unifying character: Sally the cigarette girl, played by Mia Farrow. We follow Sally from bumbling floozy to successful radio personality and along the way we get to meet the unusual characters that made radio unique: people like Rocco the gangster (Danny Aiello) who would like to help Sally get her

big break but has to kill her, and the Masked Avenger, the radio character who sounds like a cross between Superman and Cary Grant, but really looks like . . . (but that would be ruining a great joke).

Both parts of the film work well on their own and together. At home the family imagines what the celebrities are like in real life, and we then get to see how those radio personalities live out the fantasies of their listeners. The juxtaposition of these two worlds makes for an interesting statement about the realities of "normal" people and the celebrities that fascinated them.

But "interesting" just isn't enough, and that's all *Radio Days* really is; an interesting study of how radio once affected some people's lives.

Radio Days is not a great film, and I admit I was hoping for something spectacular. This film is good, and compared to most other films it's very good, but it's too alienating to be excellent. While Woody Allen films habitually teeter on the edge of self-indulgence, he always seemed to be aware that there was an audience out there as well—an audience that expected to be welcomed, not excluded to the story. For those born after 1950, born into the age of television, *Radio Days* has little meaning.

The list of co-stars in the film is veritable who's who of Woody Allen films: Mia Farrow, Tony Roberts, Jeff Daniels, Dianne Wiest, and even Diane Keaton. It's as if Allen intended this film to be his mark in film history and he wanted to gather his old friends for this, his supposed masterpiece.

Unfortunately the whole film comes off as being a little too sentimental, a little too nostalgic. It has heart, but it lacks substance.



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