

Arts

Festival movie reviewer turns into mushroom

Tough Guys Don't Dance
Norman Mailer

Barfly
Barbet Schroeder

The Princess Bride
Rob Reiner

By KEVIN PASQUINO

The only problem with having a pass to the Festival of Festivals is that it's impossible to know where to start.

In the past three days I have spent more hours in darkness than your average mushroom. Scribbling furiously with no light to write by, notes are taken and deciphered days later after a half-dozen films have been seen.

Of the movies seen at the festival so far some are remarkably well done while others are confusing and just plain bad.

The strangest of the bunch has to be Norman Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, with Mailer directing from his own screenplay.

It might stand to reason that Mailer would be the perfect person for the job because he not only wrote the novel but he also has some directing under his belt. Rather than opting for a straight-forward movie, Mailer has gone for a confusing *pot pourri* that involves decapitated corpses, cocaine and rich folks living in New England.

The movie is also filled with sexy women, macho men and tough cops. If reality were like a Norman Mailer movie all women would have long legs, big breasts and wandering eyes while men would drink, snort cocaine, get in trouble with the law and wake up in the morning with mysterious tatoos they don't remember getting.

Apparently no one has told Mailer that life is not made up of corpses, haunted houses and cocaine. The result of all this confusion is an awkward and unrealistic movie that attempts black humour but falls flat.

"Your knife is in my dog," says main character Tim Madden (Ryan O'Neal). "Hey, I'm sorry man," replies one of the bad guys. "I got nothing against your dog." That's not black, that's just stupid.

Even if *Tough Guys Don't Dance* was intended to be some kind of send-up of the detective genre it loses what little steam it had by the half-way mark. Nothing in the movie from the characters to the plot can be taken seriously. Unfortunately for Mailer the film's lack of credibility doesn't make it a comedy, it just makes it bad.

If you are—like me—one of those people who thought that Mickey Rourke could only act like Mickey Rourke, *Barfly* is an amazing testimony that Rourke can indeed play a character who isn't smooth, flashy and a lady's man.

Based on an original screenplay by poet/novelist Charles Bukowski, *Barfly* examines the life of Henry Chinaski, a man who would rather not do something than become one of the masses and assume his place in mediocrity.

Rourke, Faye Dunaway and all of the other people in the film are cut from the same wretched, pathetic cloth. These are people who drink because life has offered them



BARFLIES: Faye Dunaway and Mickey Rourke star in Barbet Schroeder's gritty film, written by cult writer Charles Bukowski.

nothing better to do or, as in Henry's case, because it allows them to escape from a life of 9 to 5 commonness.

Before the movie started, director Barbet Schroeder told the sold-out crowd that no one wanted him to make *Barfly* because it was too depressing and not funny enough. Schroeder said he and writer Charles Bukowski wanted the film to show the humour in human misery and how ludicrous life can be.

Barfly is not a particularly uplifting film and although it is very funny, at times, it does not offer a tidy "and they all lived happily ever after" ending. This will probably hurt it at the box office.

But Dunaway's performance as a once elegant woman who can only find happiness in a bottle should revitalize her career and Rourke's portrayal of the proud, swaggering barfly will earn him critical acclaim in the same way that William Hurt's unusual performance in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* brought that actor to attention two years ago.

If the idea of spending an hour and a half examining the downside of life holds no appeal the best bet at the Festival of Festivals is *The Princess Bride*.

Director by Rob Reiner from author/screenwriter William Goldman's book of the same name, *The Princess Bride* is a fairy tale filled

with giants, princesses, monsters, romance, kissing and other typical fairy tale stuff.

But the movie feels more like Monty Python than it does the brothers Grimm. There is a feeling of disbelief and sarcasm in the story as if being a princess were no big deal and being a prince does not stop someone from being a sonuvabitch. Much like the cynical age we now live in, there is the feeling that romance and love is of no great performance.

children's fairy tales. Although Goldman's script allows the romance to remain.

Reiner, who directed *This is Spinal Tap*, *The Sure Thing* and last year's *Stand By Me*, makes the movie feel like the kind of story that should have been told to children. Everything in the movie comes fast and furious with a terrific swordfight and quirky performances by Wallace Shawn and Billy Crystal thrown in for laughs.

The Princess Bride is not the kind

FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS

Walking the fine line between cynicism and romance, *The Princess Bride* tries to be both hip and sentimental, a difficult task at best. Fortunately two-time Oscar winner William Goldman brings much of the wit he used in *Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid* to this story.

The result is a movie full with strange and romantic characters who express ideas such as "This is true love. Do you think this happens every day?" and "Life is pain; anyone who says differently is selling something." Gone is the naivety of

of movie that will solve the problems of the world but it sure makes everything feel just a little more tolerable.

While maybe it's a bit of a cheat reviewing a big budget Hollywood movie like *The Princess Bride* when there are other, more esoteric films to be seen at the Festival of Festivals, Reiner's film captures everything a film festival should be about: creativity, imagination and the power film has to transport an audience to a different kind of world. The fact that it is a "Hollywood film" makes it only that much more remarkable.



POSITIVE REVIEW, PASQUINO—OR ELSE! Robin Wright and Cary Elwes star in *The Princess Bride*, director Rob "Spinal Tap" Reiner's "comic tale of true love and high adventure."

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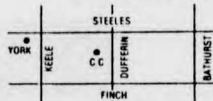
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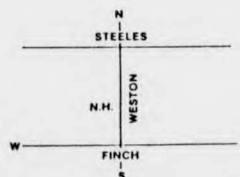
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