



L

ook up in the sky... the ghostly image of a bat projected against

the night clouds.

It's not only a signal summoning help for the good citizens of Gotham City, but a symbol that the caped crusader is once again on his way to entertain movie fans around the world.

Yes, with **Batman Returns**, the Dark Knight again takes to the streets and rooftops of Gotham, in one of the summer's most eagerly anticipated sequels.

The first *Batman* movie in 1989 earned over \$250 million in North America, with another \$155 million from foreign box offices, making it history's sixth-highest-grossing motion picture. The film's video release was also one of the most successful ever, virtually guaranteeing that DC Comics' original hero of the late 1930s would soon return to the silver screen.

Director Tim Burton is back, as is Michael Keaton reprising his role as the title character, along with a host of those familiar and much-loved characters from Alfred

the Butler (Michael Gough) to Police Commissioner Gordon (Pat Hingle). But what the fans are most curious about are not the similarities but the differences between this film and its predecessor.

Gone is Jack Nicholson's leering Joker. Ditto Vicki Vale — Batman's love interest as played by sultry Kim Basinger. What we have instead is not one but two archvillains — the nefarious Penguin (as played by Danny DeVito) and the mysterious Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer), a ferocious femme fatale just waiting to get her claws into our vigilante crimefighter.

At press time, plot details remain shrouded in secrecy, but one can only assume that this devilish duo will be double the trouble for our man in black.

Perhaps the best news is that Tim Burton is back in the director's chair to ensure that his unique and unusual vision of the hero is preserved and expanded upon.

As a major studio director, Burton is batting four-for-four, with *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, *Beetlejuice* (in which he directed Michael Keaton for the first time),

Batman and *Edward Scissorhands*. All have found wide audiences and critical praise by creating their own strange, compelling universes.

Originally trained in animation, Burton worked on such features as *The Fox and the Hound* and *The Black Cauldron*, as well as his own pet projects, including *Vincent* (an homage to Vincent Price) and *Frankenweenie*, in which a young boy brings his dead dog back to life.

His live-action career took off in 1985 with his first full-length feature, *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, and then three years later, he directed *Beetlejuice*, with Keaton starring as the manic and macabre spirit.

Keaton, too, made his name in the '80s. From his dramatic role as a substance abuser in *Clean and Sober* to the terrifying tenant in *Pacific Heights*, this popular and personable actor has demonstrated his diversity. And while some devoted Batman buffs initially questioned his casting as their favorite hero, his actual performance soon dispelled any doubts.

Also having worked with Keaton before (in *Johnny*

Dangerously) is Danny DeVito. From his role as Louie DePalma, the nasty cab dispatcher in the hit TV series *Taxi*, he has parlayed his diminutive stature into an impressive body of work, not only in such movies as *Romancing the Stone* and *Twins*, but also such dark comedies as *Throw Momma From the Train* and *The War of the Roses*, in which he both starred and directed.

With celebrated performances in *Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys* and *The Russia House*, Michelle Pfeiffer has proven herself one of today's most accomplished actresses. And as Selina Kyle, alias Catwoman, you can expect her to hold her own against the likes of both Keaton and DeVito in **Batman Returns**.

Add a number of other strong supporting performances by Christopher Walken, Michael Murphy, Vincent Schiavelli and Jan Hooks, among others; then mix in a crew of Hollywood's top set designers, costume designers and special-effects wizards; and you have the makings of a summer blockbuster.

— Richard Judge

