

Cinematic survey for intellectual stimulation a must for reading week

New Woody Allen film a delightful soap opera

By KEVIN PASQUINO

The arrival of a new Woody Allen film is like receiving a birthday present from your Aunt Bertha: it's a pleasant treat, all carefully wrapped and secretive, and it's always a little different and more thoughtful than the presents you've received from other relatives. Sometimes Aunt Bertha's presents are less than perfect, but you never forgot about the care and love that was intended.

Woody Allen is the Aunt Bertha of American films. His films are always a treat, and even when he falls short of his goal, his "failure" still stands head and shoulders above the other schlock that is being passed off as cinematic art. Fortunately, Woody Allen's latest film, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, is a complete success; the kind of success that should make other filmmakers drool with envy.

All of the stock elements of a soap opera exist within the film, including

affairs, separation, divorce and deceit.

But Allen takes the conventional, clichéd aspects of a soap opera and molds them into something delightfully new. Much of the credit for this accomplishment has to go to Allen's writing, but just as important is the strength of the ensemble cast Allen has gathered together. The three sisters (Mia Farrow, Barbara Hershey, and Diana Wiest) appear to be separate, unique individuals, but one can see how they all grew up together and have the same roots.

The rest of the cast, including Michael Caine, Carrie Fisher and Max Von Sydow, all fair as well as the sisters. Allen has now developed his writing and directing skills to the point that characters seem three-dimensional and real. Gone are the days when each character in a Woody Allen film seemed like an extension of Allen's personal neuroses.

Allen continues to examine the difference between what people are and how they act. In *Hannah* the audience is privy to the characters' thoughts, which are expressed in voice-overs. This technique seems to be one of Allen's personal favorites in revealing character. Previously used in Allen's most commercially successful film, *Annie Hall*, Allen again gets inside each of each character's head.

The only person that acts out Allen's neuroses is Woody Allen's character Mickey. In *Hannah* Allen acts more as comic relief than part of the overall story, with his interaction with Hannah's family being minimal until towards the end of the film. Mickey's purpose in the film is to elicit huge chuckles from the audience. The typical Woody Allen questions about the meaning of life, death and religion are all explored in a frantic manner by Mickey, who is certain death is just a scythe swing

away. Mickey skips from religion to religion hoping to find some kind of peace, and the result is some of the funniest comic bits in recent films.

Perhaps the nicest surprise with *Hannah and Her Sisters* is it's very satisfying ending. Oh it's a happy ending and it seems that everyone has found happiness, but it all seems realistic and natural. It's been a long time since Woody Allen has allowed his characters to be happy at the conclusion of his film, and while that in itself is a nice change of pace, even nicer is the uncontrived style of the end. Everyone gets what they want and, in an almost un-Woody Allen



fashion, there is a sense of peace among the characters.

For those people who aren't fortunate enough to have a terrific Aunt Bertha who always comes through with great presents, they should be thankful that Woody Allen is there to take her place. His films are thoughtful and filled with a respect for his audience that few filmmakers seem to have. *Hannah and Her Sisters* is a fabulous present for a movie lover.

Brazil exudes style

By ALEX PATTERSON

"I think audiences will laugh—or cry—for help! They'll catch themselves chuckling and suddenly realize they shouldn't be laughing at such horrendous stuff."

—Terry Gilliam, writer/director of *Brazil*

He's right. They shouldn't laugh. But they will. They'll not be able to help it. *Brazil*, the oddly-titled, multimillion-dollar satirical fantasy that almost didn't get released, is an extremely funny movie. The humor, though, is unsettling; its comedy is a dark shade of black, and usually out to make a point.

The point is to expose some of the real idiocy around us by exaggerating it: present trends are taken to their illogical extreme in an all-too-foreseeable future. Set "sometime in the 20th century," *Brazil* is a garish, nightmarish spectacle about One Man's Fight Against A Totalitarian State. Borrowing heavily from 1984 (particularly Michael Radford's film version), ex-Monty Python animation expert Terry Gilliam has created a think-piece on some of Orwell's concerns and disguised it as a special effects extravaganza.

Protagonist Sam Lowry (Jonathon Pryce of *The Ploughman's Lunch*), like 1984's Winston Smith, is a functionary in the Ministry of Records, and also like Winston, he falls in love with a young woman out of favor with the State (Kim Greist). So complex is *Brazil*, however, that as much as it resembles Orwell's dystopia, it also recalls *Modern Times*, *Brave New World*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and even *Mad Max*. The various influences might be attributed to Gilliam's collaborators on the script: Actor Charles McKeown and playwright Tom Stoppard. These three disparate individuals, together with some movie magicians who could teach the Lucas-Berg bunch a thing or three (for once, special effects really are special), have come up with a truly extraordinary experience. Style and content, which have recently seemed to be mutually exclusive terms, are both in abundance in one convenient location in *Brazil*.

There is style galore both in Gilliam's camerawork—there is one extremely long tracking shot near the beginning where we are pulled down one corridor at the Ministry, around a corner and down another corridor which is a marvel of choreography—



Jonathon Pryce in *Brazil*: Cinematographic acrobatics offer a unique view of entrapment.

and in the production design. Visually the film is a riot: brutalist architecture, stylized costumes, anachronistic technologies, wild lighting and unnatural color thrill and appall the eye simultaneously. With so much to look at, the excellent supporting cast (Robert De Niro, *Dance With A Stranger's* Ian Holm, *The Long Good Friday's* Bob Hoskins, former Python Michael Palin) is as icing on the cake.

Gilliam, the boy from *Brazil*, has demonstrated that the success of his 1981 *Time Bandits*—another shard from the same shattered mentality—was no accident. He is a very lucky man, in that imaginations as paranoic as his are usually locked up, and are not usually given the Gross National Product of some emerging countries to indulge themselves on celluloid. It is fortunate for us that he was, although two and a quarter hours is a trifle long for even the most creative filmmaker to sustain this sort of whimsy. For the moment, *Brazil* may be remembered as a popular song from the 1930s, but soon it will be known as one of the movies of the 1980s.

Film from Netherlands questions coldness of social service system

By KEVIN PASQUINO

Now that the Christmas season is officially over and *Rocky IV* has taken a fall at the box office, many big budget, blockbuster films are just around the corner. But amidst these new Hollywood movies comes a film from the Netherlands that should not be overlooked.

The winner of several awards at various film festivals, including the Venice Film Festival and Toronto's Festival of Festivals, *The Taste of Water* is a harsh look at the coldly regulated social systems of today's society and how one person's help can occasionally make a difference.

The film starts with an atypical day for Hes, a social worker who deals with people as if they were poorly trained house pets. Each person is given a number, a specified amount of time to state his case and is then shown the door once the proper form has been filled out. And then the next number in the cattle call is sent in to get help.

It quickly becomes apparent that Hes has been at this job for many years. As he trains a young worker, the cynicism, bitterness and fatalistic attitudes of years of work become increasingly clear. "You cannot change people," Hes explains, "just conditions."

Hes learns that the death of an elderly couple has orphaned a 14-year-old girl. In an attempt to appease the apprentice's claims that they should try to help people rather than case numbers, Hes and the trainee go to see what they can do to help the girl and see that she gets the institutionalizing she needs.

The arrival at the tiny apartment brings them a surprise. Rather than finding a mourning young girl, they find an untamed child who sleeps, eats and goes to the washroom in a

cupboard. Unable to communicate and terrified of anyone that attempts to breach her "home," Anna is uncontrollable.

From what Hes has stated about his job and the condition of the needy, it is expected that he call for a strait jacket right away, but he instead attempts to communicate and educate Anna. His decision to get involved will eventually cost him his wife, his job, and his sense of justice.

The Taste of Water was the first full-length film directed by Orlow Seunke. A graduate of the Amsterdam

rounded by needy people who all have their lives of misery neatly filed and catalogued in the building's basement. Everyone feels that they need special assistance and Hes knows that is not possible. In order to give Anna the help she needs, Hes is forced to deal with the system he used to be in charge of. He too becomes yet another number waiting to be called.

Rather than make a film that blatantly criticizes the coldness of the social service, Seunke presents it in such a way that it comes to be an inevitable product of our society.



THE BOGEYMAN COMETH: from *The Taste of Water*.

Film Academy, Seunke worked for several years in Dutch television, directing episodic shows and documentaries.

It is his experience with documentaries that is most prevalent in this film. The crowded setting of the social-service office and Anna's filthy home become distastefully realistic in the film.

Feelings of helplessness and claustrophobia run throughout the film. Within his office Hes is sur-

Because so many are in need of help, few receive it. *The Taste of Water* does not say the impersonal structure of the social system is right or wrong, it simply questions whether one man should be allowed to help one needy person at the cost of neglecting hundreds of others. By the end of the film that question becomes more and more difficult to definitively answer, and the film does not attempt to do so; it leaves that problem to its audience.

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