

Arts & Entertainment

The Gateway 3rd Annual Summer Movie Wrap-Up

by Glenn St-Germain

Summertime. Long, hot days, warm nights, parties, swimming pools, beaches, ice cream, cold beer, and the occasional monsoon (or so it seemed this summer, anyway...). And movies.

The summer season is the peak release time for the motion picture studios, and with good reason. More people see movies in summer than any other time of year (except possibly the Christmas break) because that's when people have the most time. The studios and distributors save their best for these periods for that reason.

The summer of 1988 had a few really good movies, films that should be on any moviegoer's must-see list. There were also a few really terrible films, movies that were complete wastes of celluloid. Most films, however, were somewhere in between and this set the tone for the past summer: mediocre. There were fewer extreme highs and lows in the movies this summer than in past years.

This summer was typical in one respect, however, in that it continued a trend that has been developing like a cancer in the movie business: the sequel. This summer, movie patrons were treated to no less than eight sequels, all but two having a number at the end of the title, from *Crocodile Dundee 2* to *Friday the 13th Part VII*. As is typical with sequels, most were pale imitations of the originals, and failed miserably. The worst performances were *Short Circuit 2*, which lacked the innocent charm of the original, and *Rambo III*, which died at the box office faster than the commies did in the film.

The best of the sequel lot was *Crocodile Dundee II*, which actually had more of a plot than its predecessor. *Dirty Harry — The Dead Pool*, number five in the series (and probably the last), wasn't too bad. *Big Top Pee-Wee* and *Caddyshack II* were as uninspiring as their originals. And for sheer overkill there was *Friday the 13th Part VII* and *Nightmare on Elm Street IV*. (Fans of Freddy and his fatal fingernails will want to check out his new TV show this fall, *Freddy's Nightmares*, a syndicated half hour program. I kid you not.)

Other trends from previous years continued over this summer. Almost half the releases this summer were comedies; typical summer fare. Action-adventure films, out of vogue the last few summers, made a bit of a comeback. Fantasy and horror continued their decline in numbers, while serious dramas and romances were there in the background, somewhere.

Although comedies were the most prevalent type of film, the typical summer comedy film of years gone by was nowhere to be seen. Gone at last (hopefully) is the kind of film characterized by a sunny locale (usually a beach), a large cast of

oddball characters, juvenile humour, and one-dimensional plot involving the search for fun/sex/parties/whatever. The closest approach this summer was *The Great Outdoors*, which centered around a family's vacation at a fishing lake lodge. It did have something in common with all those mindless beach movies, though: it was terrible.

Comedies, in fact, are getting more intelligent. Leading the pack were John Cleese's *A Fish Called Wanda*, Tom Hanks' *Big*, and the very strange *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, which combined live action and top-notch animation in a hilarious send-up of 1940's hardboiled detective flicks. Where else could you see Donald Duck and Daffy Duck together on stage? A technical masterpiece, this one was fun, although quite silly in places, and featured (among others) Christopher Lloyd as the best villain of the summer.

Other comedies of note included Eddie Murphy's reworking of the Student Prince motif in *Coming to America*, with Murphy and co-star Arsenio Hall in several cameos throughout, and *Midnight Run*, featuring a

Top right: Tom Hanks in his first serious role; bottom left: favourite Eddie Murphy with Arsenio Hall.

madcap trip across the U.S.A. Less worthy efforts included teenybopper flicks such as *Licence to Drive*, *Casual Sex*, and *Johnny Be Good*. Chevy Chase appeared twice, in *Caddyshack II* and *The Funny Farm*, adding more evidence to the idea that he is incapable of making a watchable film.

Action-adventure films, with lots of gunfire, fast-paced suspense, macho heroes, etc., made a small comeback. The usual crowd was there: Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Eastwood, and Norris each had a film. However, by far the best of the lot was *Die Hard*, featuring a very non-macho Bruce Willis versus a bunch of terrorists. Had any of the above macho-types starred in this one, it would have been very shallow and predictable. Willis as an ordinary guy gave this one surprising depth, especially when one considers the low quality of his previous two films.

Dirty Harry made probably his final appearance in *The Dead Pool*, which is about midway in quality compared to the other four *Dirty Harry* movies. This film has the plus of having the most original car-chase sequence yet (and what's a cop movie without car chases?): Harry and his partner trying to get away from a souped-up, radio-controlled toy Porsche loaded with plastique explosives.



The runner-up in the original car-chase sequence category would go to Schwarzenegger's *Red Heat*, with Arnie as a Russian cop sent to Chicago to extradite a drug pusher. At one point, Arnie chases his quarry through the streets of Chicago — each in a Greyhound bus.

There were only a few horror and fantasy entries in this summer's movie list. The horror buffs had to make do with the continuing adventures of Jason and Freddy, as well as *Monkey Shines*, some drivel involving a man hooked up psionically to a baboon, or something like that.

For fantasy and SF lovers, only two movies were to be found. One was George Lucas' *Willow*, directed by Ron Howard. *Willow* was a fantasy of epic proportions, featuring heroes, villains, weird creatures, and magic. The other film was *Mac and Me*, essentially an *ET* ripoff.

As is also typical of summer, serious movies with meaning were few and far between. However, there were more of them this year than last. The most noticeable was Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (reviewed elsewhere in this edition), a serious Biblical epic that has generated a large amount of controversy. While some call it blasphemous, others are calling it uplifting. More than anything else, the controversy is probably making a large contribution to the film's revenues.

Michael Keaton, until now a comedy actor, broke into drama with *Clean and Sober*, one man's struggle with addiction and how he conquered it. With this film, he proved he can cut it as a serious actor.

In other films, *Colors* looked at L.A. gang violence in a movie that was either very true-to-life or out-and-out fantasy, depending on which critic one listens to, while *The Milagro Beanfield War* (this reviewer's choice for Worst Title) involved a struggle between old ways and new in a farming community.

Romance hit the big screen in *Bull Durham*, featuring a baseball player, and *Cocktail*, featuring a bartender. *Cocktail* was a very standard poor boy/rich girl romance, with Tom Cruise adding sparkle with some very deft moves with bottles behind the bar. However, if you've seen the previews, you've seen it all.

For nostalgia buffs (and the kids), Disney re-re-re-re-released *Bambi*, a classic, and *The Fox and The Hound*, not a classic.

Overall, it wasn't a bad summer. Like any movie season, it had its highs and its lows. There was, at least, something worth watching for everyone, more than can be said for some years gone by.

Here are this reviewer's picks for the best and worst five films of the Summer of 1988:

The Top Five (Alphabetically):

Big — Tom Hanks as a 12-year-old who is mystically transformed into an adult, courtesy of a wish. What follows is a hilarious romp as a kid in a grown man's body tries to cope with the adult world — and does, sort of. The best performance in Hanks' career; he is believable as a typical twelve-year-old.

Die Hard — Bruce Willis as a New York cop visiting family in L.A., who winds up being missed by terrorists who take over a 40-storey office tower he's in. Willis doesn't even try to be macho, which makes this one work. Once the action starts, it's enough to keep you on the edge of your seat all the way through, in the best action film in years.

A Fish Called Wanda — John Cleese and fellow Monty Python alumnus Michael Palin, plus Jamie Lee Curtis and Kevin Kline, in a madcap farce involving a jewel heist and the collaborators' attempts to doublecross one another once the deed is done. Who says British humour is inaccessible to North American audiences?

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54-40; Music on campus

by Tracy Rowan

The live music scene on campus kicked off this year with Vancouver's 54-40 delivering a hard-hitting set of intelligent rock and roll at a half-full SUB Theatre last Friday night.

The quartet, fronted by a passionate figure in Neil Osborne, rolled through a number of catchy songs from their self-titled LP ("I Go Blind", "Baby Ran") and the recent Warner Bros. release *Show Me*.

Joined in mid-set by keyboardist David Osborne (Neil's older brother), the band built up momentum with promising new material like "Here in My House", later ripping through the crowd-pleasing "One Gun" ("a song about a lot of things"), "Walk in Line", and an unforgettable version of "One Day in Your Life".

While much of Phil Comparelli's striking trumpet playing is unfortunately underused in the live setting, the band did display a

much harder edge on stage than their past vinyl efforts would suggest.

In other musical events on campus, anyone within earshot of Quad will have figured out by now that the Students' Union annual sampling of beer and live music, Freshman Introduction Week, is underway.

This afternoon, you can catch Edmonton's own Grace Under Pressure, who this summer won k-97's Homegrown competition with their original "Belli to Belli". Following Grace Under Pressure will be BYU or Bob's Your Uncle, an intriguing 5-piece out of Vancouver. Friday's lineup includes the Yard Dogs and Ska Boom, along with Bachman Turner Overdrive and Beatles' tribute 1964.

Other upcoming acts on campus to check out include Colin James at Bear Country and some hot rhythm and blues artists booked at the Power Plant this month.

