

ENTERTAINMENT GATEWAY STYLE

Woody's Reminiscent *Radio Days*

Radio Days
Orion Pictures
Westmount Theatre 4

review by Elaine Ostry

"I don't mean to romanticize the past... it wasn't always as stormy and windswept as this." Thus Woody Allen begins his autobiographical movie, *Radio Days*. This movie is narrated by Allen and features his childhood in Rockaway Point, Queens. It is a collection of childhood reminiscences and anecdotes about the world of radio performers of the Forties.

Radio Days shows how radio was an integral part of the lives of ordinary people whose lives lacked the glamour of the radio stars. Radio brought people together and brought news items into their homes. This is demonstrated by the family's reaction to the World War Two broadcasts.

The movie is made up of several disparate anecdotes and incidents. Some of them are hilarious, some of them soggy with sentimentality. Music and Allen's narration connects them together, but these connections are not always smooth. The storylines are abrupt and rough; the overall format is too loose to accommodate a story longer than a few anecdotes. For example, you never do find out how Sally the Cigarette Girl, played by Mia Farrow, gets her real big break.

But most of the individual episodes are excellent in themselves. The movie opens with a pair of cat burglars winning a radio 'Name That Tune' contest while robbing a home. Other notable incidents are when Allen steals money he is collecting for the Jews in Palestine to buy a Masked Avenger pin, and when his Aunt Bea and her boyfriend hear the broadcast of 'the War of the Worlds' — and believe it.

Some of these stories are truly moving, especially the one about Allen's parent's wedding anniversary, the first time that the young Allen sees his parents kiss. But the episodes are more often quite sentimental. For example, the story about the drowned girl is overdone.

Woody Allen cannot resist the urge to throw in a couple of "Meaning of Life" speeches, a bad habit of his. The scenes in which the young Allen looks out to sea, and when the radio stars go on the rooftop to welcome in the New Year (1944), seem

forced. A child is not as articulate about philosophical matters as Allen supposes; it is obviously the thoughts of the adult Allen being revealed. Silence in these two "Meaning of Life" scenes would have conveyed Allen's meaning with much more effect. Allen needs to learn that silence is often more desirable; that the meaning should not always be explicitly explained.

Allen has the ability to mingle music with mood and plot very well. Music pervades the movies, lending it a graceful, romantic air. Lots of Cole Porter classics are featured, such as "Night and Day", and there is also many South American-style tunes to add brio to the movie.

The cinematography by Carlo Di Palma, is beautiful. Each shot is a work of art, especially the shots of the rainy streets of the town. The movie recreates the early forties very effectively, in minute detail.

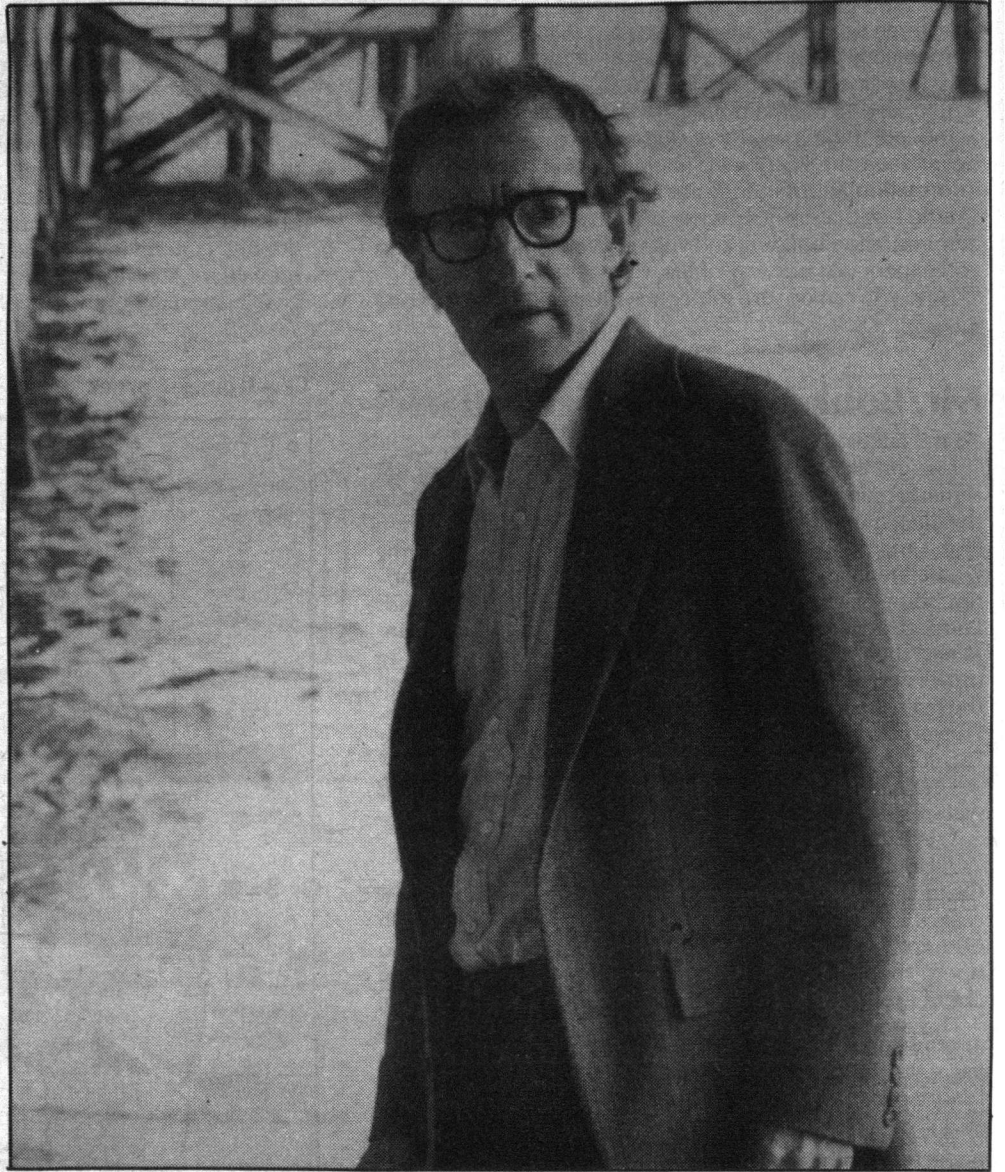
However, the cinematography, the music, and the form of the movie itself all overwhelm the actors. They fade into the background; the movie often seems to be a tableau instead of a true story. The characters are quite stereo-typical of an extended Jewish family, and much less real than the characters of some of Allen's former movies. The family of *Hannah and Her Sisters*, for instance, is far more convincing.

Dianne Wiest as Aunt Bea is by far the most convincing and sincere performance of the movie. She is the young lady looking for a husband, and who is continuously disappointed by her various boyfriends. Wiest has a very expressive face, that shows emotions subtly. Wiest is successful at demonstrating the courage of the lonely, that takes the form of forced cheerfulness and hope.

Mia Farrow is definitely upstaged by Wiest. Farrow gives a disappointing performance as Sally-the-Cigarette-Girl-who-wants-to-be-a-star. Her character is a caricature; she seems to be a picture, not a person, and too stupid for real.

The father and mother of Allen, played by Michael Tucker and Julie Kavner, are people "whose values in life are God and carpeting". They are first presented in rather stereotypical ways, but as the movie progresses their characters develop. It is moving to see how they grow closer as the mother's pregnancy advances, and their second child is born.

Seth Green as the young Woody Allen is very good. He looks just like Allen probably did, and he looks as if he is always thinking, a



Woody Allen: the incurable romantic.

quality that few actors seem to have.

The uncle, who loves fish (the source of a number of cute jokes), is truly funny. His wife, and the grandparents, are nearly nonexistent. Cousin Ruthie, played by Joy Newman, is hilarious when she lip-syncs to a salsa tune.

The episodes about the radio stars themselves are less interesting, and the characters less real. This is likely because the viewer only sees them once or twice and their char-

acters are not given time to develop.

Radio Days is an interesting and brave movie. The writing and direction of Allen does not always work, but it is usually very funny. I'm glad that he had the courage to do this type of movie, rather than continue with the conventional style of filmmaking marking his last film, *Hannah and Her Sisters*. This movie will appeal to incurable romantics with a sense of humour, and lovers of old music and old times.

Studio's *Love for Love's* Laughs Live on

by Elaine Ostry

"Come, come, leave business to idlers, and wisdom to fools: they have need of 'em: wit be my faculty, and pleasure my occupation." This is the invitation and the creed of Valentine, the hero of Congreve's *Love For Love*, presented by Studio Theatre this week.

Love For Love is a comedy of manners, written in 1695 by William Congreve. It has a rather complicated plot that I will spare you. The characters belong to the elite social milieu of seventeenth century London, that class that eschewed work and occupied itself with entertainment such as love, gossip, and exercising their wit.

This social group was inherently superficial and perverse; one in which men boasted about their illegitimate offspring. Their speech was an elevated, elaborate gloss over this vulgarity. It was also extremely hypocritical. An example is the scene in which Tattle explains the methods of love to Prue, a country girl, with the aim of seducing her (in all propriety). He states:

"All well-bred persons lie. Besides, you are a woman, you must never speak what you think. Your words must contradict your thoughts, but your actions may contradict your words."

All the actors in *Love For Love* must show these contradictions among words, thoughts, and actions more clearly, because it is within these contradictions that Congreve's satire lies. Some of the actors come closer than others in showing these distinctions; great individual performances are not equally matched.

For instance, Sharon McFarlane as Angelica, the heroine upon whom the fate of the hero Valentine rests, is surprisingly dull. Her voice is thin and sometimes strained; she seems unsure of herself at first. Towards the end of the play, she seems to grow more confident and energetic. However, she should show her true thoughts more clearly to the audience so that the final scene between herself and Valentine, the turning point of the play, would be more convincing and moving.

John Ferguson gives a solid performance as Valentine, the devoted lover. However, his mad scene is repulsive rather than funny; he seems to portray mental retardation rather than mental illness.

These two characters, upon which the plot of the play rests, are definitely upstaged by the rest of the cast. Scandal, played by Howard Kruschke, is suave and interesting;

Kruschke is a self-assured actor. Juan Chioran as Sir Sampson Legend is convincing as a hearty middle-aged man falling in love; his scene with Angelica is very funny.

Frank Manfredi as Ben, Valentine's seafaring brother, is a breath of fresh air on the stage with his clear, strong voice and down-to-earth quality that contrasts well with the urban characters. Andrew Akman as Tattle seems to exaggerate his character's feminine-like foppery, decreasing his believability as a skilled lover.

However, I wondered why the male characters all trembled so much. It looked a little ridiculous, as if they were afflicted with severe chills (probably from the lack of central heating).

Loretta Bailey, in my opinion, steals the show as Miss Frail. She succeeds in portraying a very saucy, sly coquette, with great humour. Bailey relaxes into her role: her movements and speech are assured, precise, natural. Her inflections are insinuating, sarcastic. The initial scene between Miss Frail and Mrs. Foresight is one of the funniest of the play, illustrating good team work between the two actresses. Michele Muzzi plays Mrs. Foresight well, although she sometimes seems a little starched. Vicki Papavas plays

energy.

The problem that most of the characters show is that they talk too fast, often too fast to be understood. I realize that the speech pattern of seventeenth century English was faster than today's, but this play is being performed to an audience of the twentieth century, one unaccustomed to such speed. Some lines cannot be heard at all. The pace of the play itself needs to be more consistent. It drags in the first half, and picks up considerably in the second.

The set of *Love For Love* is clever; the costumes, especially the women's dresses, are gorgeous. Even the lighting showed attention to detail, such as the dimming of lights to show the passage of the day, illustrating the reliance upon candles in the days before electricity.

The program note by Director David William claims that beneath the comic surface of the play, "one senses from time to time the deeper music of the human heart." Well, I did not personally think that the play was moving or profound. But although it lacks this emotional depth, and the satiric elements of the play are not fully developed, *Love for Love* is successful as a straight comedy of manners.