

Film: separating 1983's diamonds from dogs

By CYNTHIA MACDONALD

I won't attempt to name the best films of the last year—a near impossible task. 1983 was a year in which the diamonds outnumbered the dogs; the *Two of a Kinds*, *Losin' Its*, and *Lonely Ladys* were merely unfortunate intermissions between the numerous class acts. The best one can do is to take several examples of 1983's harvest, applaud them accordingly and wish them all well. Here, then, are 10 which deserve loving mention—from the classic *The Right Stuff* to the just plain classy *The King of Comedy*.

1) *The Right Stuff*: Time flies when you're having fun. This 3-hour extravaganza never loses hold of its slack-jawed audience, due to its teeth-curling special effects, uniformly great performances and collection of beautiful images. This isn't simply a film about American nationalism; it's about modern technology and political obtuseness and keeping cool under pressure. Mix all this in with a dollop of epic grandeur, and you have the best film of 1983.

2) *The Return of Martin Guerre*: Fabulous acting is what renders this one of the loveliest pictures within recent memory. Gerard Depardieu is a man who comes to a 16th-century French village, posing as the long-lost husband of one of its inhabitants, the winsome Nathalie Baye. She knows he's an impostor, but falls in love with him anyway. The emotion generated after the discovery of the man's crime, during his trial and subsequent execution is overwhelming.

3) *Experience Preferred . . . But Not Essential*: The story has been told and re-told; young girl discovers love and life during a summer away at a resort hotel, blossoming from an awkward tomboy into a genteel lady. This film offers a spicy, funny, and heart-crushingly charming twist on the old tale, with Annie (Elizabeth Edmonds) and her summer chums being especially endearing in their ineptitude. The laughs are abundant and honestly come by, and director Peter Duffell infuses his work with so many funny human details that one leaves the theatre able to identify with all the characters, utterly satisfied.

4) *Never Cry Wolf*: An enormous movie, but stirringly simple. The Farley Mowat story of a biologist's expedition to study the behaviour of Arctic wolves has been committed to film with a brilliant understatedness; director Carroll Ballard knows the northern wilds speak for themselves, and chose to streamline his cast and production expenses. Protagonist Tovar (Charles Martin Smith) is gentle, funny, and smart. And the wolves, of course, are elegance incarnate.

5) *Risky Business*: Very sharp. Propelled along by a Tangerine Dream soundtrack and 24-karat acting by (then) unknowns, this comedy about a boy who opens a brothel in his suburban home to pay off debts was a well-deserved hit. Worth seeing twice, if not thrice.

6) *Starstruck*: Once you relax into the lazy rhythms of this Australian pop musical, you find yourself enjoying it very much. Jo Kennedy is Jackie, an auburn-haired modern who just wants to be a star. At times reckless, at



Class act: Robert DeNiro as would-be comic Rupert Pupkin in Scorsese's *King of Comedy*.

times as slow as a Sunday in August, *Starstruck* is unlike any movie—let alone musical—that has ever been made before.

7) *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*: An art movie and a war movie in one beautiful, complex package. This film explores, carefully and believably, the relationships between two Japanese officers and their British POWs. English primness meets Oriental sternness, and underneath it all is the ache to communicate. Ryuichi Sakamoto's score is absolutely stunning.

8) *The Big Chill*: A baby-boomer reminiscence universal enough to hold the interest of those who weren't there. The performances of the eight principals are stellar for the most part, and Lawrence Kasdan's screenplay is satirically sweet. A nice celebration of that most basic of commodities—friendship. Great '60s soundtrack, too.

9) *Breathless*: Jim McBride's remake of Godard's masterly love story—between a petty crook and an impenetrable student—isn't nearly as innovative as the original, but it's colorful, fast, and well-acted. Richard Gere looks a bit healthy for the part of cop-killer Jesse, but he handles the screenplay nicely: "The future?" he says lazily, driving down the highway. "Yeah, some people talk about it. I think it's a bunch of bullshit."

10) *King of Comedy*: A clever, tragicomic film about two losers trying to overtake their comedian idol—first by kidnapping him, then by having one of them appear on his show. As the victim, Jerry Lewis downplays magnificently. As aspiring comedian Rupert Pupkin, Robert DeNiro is just the kind of excited, garishly-dressed nebbish we see all the time but never bother to look at closely. A funny movie about pathetic characters. It leaves you thinking.

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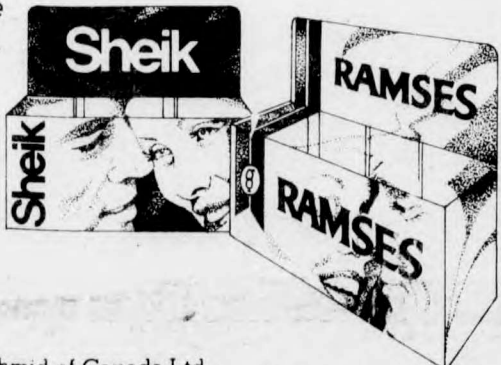
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