

ENTERTAINMENT

Little Drummer carries big guns

The Little Drummer Girl
Warner Bros.
Capitol Square

review by John Charles

"Do you like to walk?" asks Joseph.
"Oh, yes, compulsively," answers Charlie,
"— in several directions at once."

That's a truer statement than Charlie (Diane Keaton) realizes. She's the title character of *The Little Drummer Girl*, the movie of John le Carre's best-selling spy novel.

Charlie's an American actress working in an English repertory company. She likes acting because she finds her own background and life unglamorous.

The movie deftly shows us how her career relates to her eagerness to impress people, to seem tragically dramatic and purposeful. She takes up trendy political causes, like being pro-Arab and anti-Zionist, and marches in Trafalgar Square as a committed artist.

A chance encounter with a PLO terrorist, whose masked lecture she attends, leads to romantic fantasies about him. And a whirlwind series of apparently random events — including going to Greece to film a wine commercial — brings her into a group of Israeli terrorists who want to enlist her as a double agent to capture and murder the PLO agent.

Kurtz (Klaus Kinski) is the Israeli chief who sees through her political beliefs, or beliefs of any kind. He persuades her that they too, want to "stop the killings," and only this one death is necessary.

"I'll give you a job in the Theatre of the Real," he promises. "It's the most demanding job you've ever had."

When she agrees, it's because of the void within her, and because she's really in love with Joseph (Yorgo Voyagis), the Israeli who let her think he was the PLO agent until she was hooked. So Charlie finally gets to play out her liberal fantasy, as the final mistress of a now-dead PLO hero — passionately aligning herself with her former superficial beliefs, yet being believed by the PLOs themselves. But that's only the first stage. . . .

John le Carre's long, complex novel was a critical success, and the readers I know either loved or hated it. The latter found it too long, too romantic and too psychologically introspective to be the 'old-fashioned spy novel' they wanted — which sounds like it's all to le Carre's credit as a serious writer.

Not having read it, I can assert that Loring Mandel's terse screenplay tells an exciting, plausible and coherent story that succeeds as a good thriller and as a disturbing study in human relations. You don't notice lots of loose ends which le Carre fans have to explain for you, the way you do in Stephen King movies.

One of the terrifying lines in Orwells *Nineteen Eight-Four* is Big Brother's boast to the protagonist about how the State can transform enemies into compliant citizens. "We will empty you, and fill you with ourselves,"

he says.

In a way that's what the Israelis do with Charlie. What's more disorienting is that they fill her with *both* sides of the conflict, since she must be intimately acquainted with the daily suffering of Palestinians in order to espouse the cause.

Both sides seem willing to do anything for their cause, and if le Carre was (supposedly) more sympathetic to the Israelis, I find the PLOs marginally more sympathetic in the movie, simply because it's the Israelis who are cynically exploiting Charlie. When it's clear to Kurtz how much Charlie still loves Joseph, in spite of being set up by him, and how genuinely engaged Joseph's emotions are too, Kurtz can still say to Joseph: "I'll leave it to you how you want to play with her emotions — whether you want to get close or remain distant."

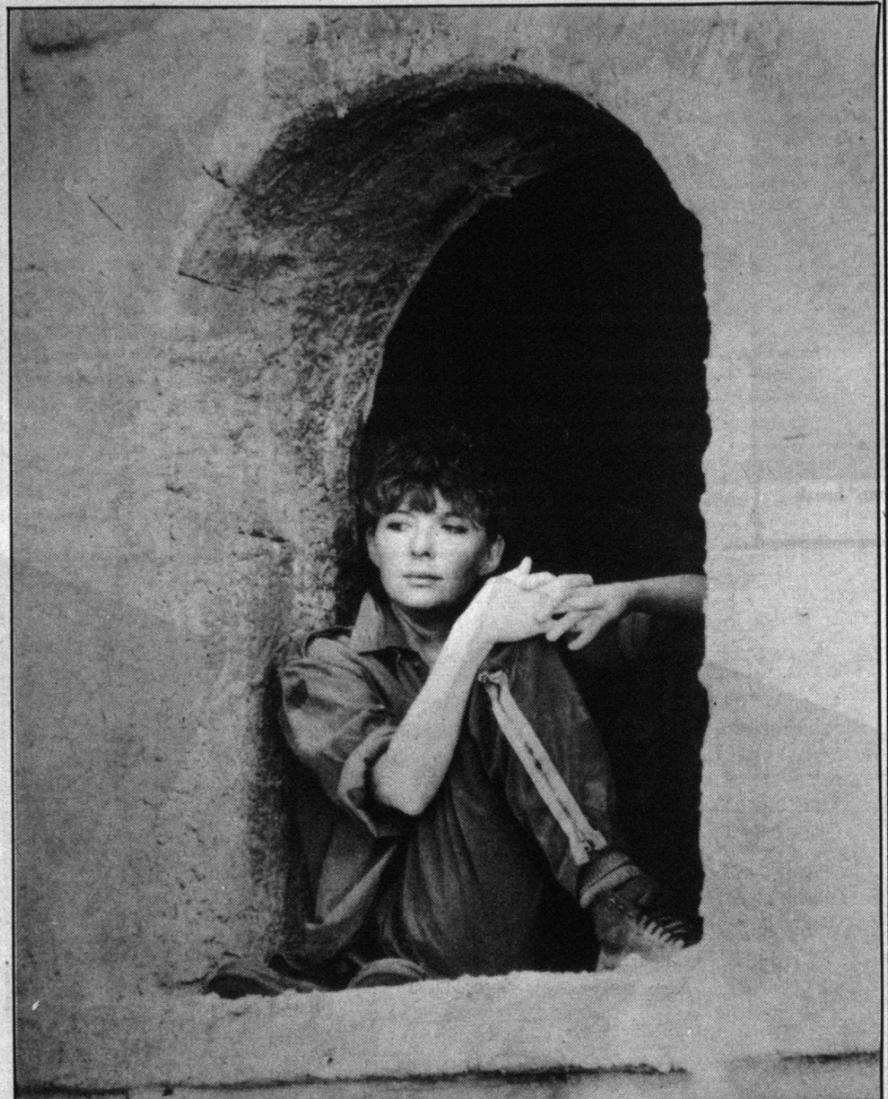
Director George Roy Hill has made an exciting, intelligent movie that hardly pauses until it's over. Maybe because Hill, as a young actor, toured with a theatre troupe, the backstage scenes have an immediate authority. And the brief scene of Charlie playing Shaw's Saint Joan, where she prays, "How long, O Lord, how long?" and wonders when mankind will be ready to deal with saints without having to kill them first, has reverberations that echo throughout the film.

Keaton is splendid, and really in control throughout. We see a lightweight Annie Hall scatterbrain, who wants an affair with an exotic type, grow into someone much deeper through her own suffering and her witness to the anguish of the Middle East. Keaton charts Charlie's changes beautifully, without false histrionics.

The whole cast is excellent, especially Kinski, who walks a fine line between being admirable and loathsome. If Voyagis seems too ambiguous, that's the kind of character he is, and though friends tell me his interactions with Charlie have been pared down to the minimum, he was just as ambiguous in the novel.

If the film is hard to remember two days after seeing it, while I can vividly recall movies seen a year ago, it's because Hill has given us no memorable images. The movie never descends into a travelogue, which is often a risk in international productions. But cameraman Wolfgang Treu only shows us the story itself, cleanly and pointedly, without any resonance from settings, landscapes, groupings. None of the story's underlying meaning is shown us. There's one powerful image which stands out because it's the only example.

Keaton is at a table, looking up a staircase, down which a tortured, drugged PLO man staggers. The Israelis are showing her since she must know his features for future reference. The camera angle shows her from the back, and as he crosses to her left, the others turn to watch him. But Keaton doesn't turn, and because of that frozen position,



Charlie (Diane Keaton) finds herself on both sides the Middle East conflict in *The Little Drummer Girl*.

even without seeing her face we know how shaken she is by the appalling reality abruptly confronting her. It's only a moment, but it's superb, tactful storytelling.

Hill is best known for his two Redford-/Newman buddy films, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Sting*. And those films had a visual style, whether you liked it or not. But Hill also made *Slaughterhouse Five* and *The World According to Garp*, and he's lately become known in Hollywood as the

man who can turn difficult literary works into box-office gold. Those movies, while respectable, are also impersonal in style, and are now of interest to fans of the novels, rather than becoming independent works of movie history.

It seems likely *The Little Drummer Girl* will join them. Seeing the movie a second time would be pointless, as it has no secrets, no visual delights to yield up.

Volcano looms

Under the Volcano
Universal Pictures
Plaza Cinemas

review by David Jordan

Alcoholics don't often amount to much, and autobiographies usually make lousy fiction. Malcolm Lowry's 1947 novel *Under the Volcano* belies both these maxims, and this screen adaptation, directed by John Huston, captures all the gut-wrenching tragedy that flowed directly from Lowry's life into his fiction.

With a setting taken directly from Lowry's stay in Mexico between 1936 and '38, *Under the Volcano* tells the story of a dipsomaniac diplomat who has disgraced himself out of a career, and lost his wife. The pathetic tragedy is driven home when Geoffrey's wife returns, and the two are on the verge of recapturing the love that hovers just beyond their grasp. That love is buried forever, though, beneath

the consul's incessant intake of scotch and tequila.

Albert Finney is spectacular as the bitter Englishman whose life is a constant struggle to regulate "the delicate balance between the shakes of too little and the abyss of too much." At moments, Finney shows us a warm, compassionate man whom we want desperately to love, then just when redemption seems imminent, the irascible drunkard takes over.

Yvonne is hardly more than a backdrop to Geoffrey's tragic life, and Jaqueline Bisset captures the anguish and frustration of the alienated wife beautifully without stealing the limelight from Finney.

This is classic movie making at its best: nothing but the highest professionalism in writing, directing, and acting. It carries a powerful message, and is not recommended for those seeking an evening of laughs and escapism.



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