

CINEMA

Review:

The Breakfast Club

Written and directed by John Hughes; starring Emilio Estevez, Anthony Michael Hall, Judd Nelson, Molly Ringwald, Ally Sheedy.

Something happened to the teenage film awhile back. For some time, pictures like *Taps*, *The Outsiders*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Risky Business* were the rule. These films and others like them took a stab at exploring the real problems of teenage life—peer pressure, parental expectations, role playing. *Porky's* changed all that; the biggest problem in the teen sex frolic glut that followed was how many times the characters got laid.

John Hughes took a stab at changing that. Last year's *Sixteen Candles*, Hughes' debut as writer/director, meshed gentle humor, wonderful characters and wacky, clever gags with a genuine understanding of the American teenager. His second film, *The Breakfast Club*, takes a more serious, though no less delightful, look at the problems of modern teenagers.

The *Breakfast Club* is a group of five diverse schoolkids brought together for an 8-hour Saturday detention. They come from vastly different cliques (they describe themselves rather understatedly as "a brain, an athlete, and a basket-case, a princess and a criminal"). They've never met before and probably would never have come into contact without this coincidental punishment. They've been told by the principal (a disciplinarian with a chip on his shoulder) to sit and contemplate why they are here and write a thousand word essay on who they think they are. As can be expected, they learn a lot about themselves as they learn about each other, and they form a bond of friendship and understanding before the day is over.

Hughes hangs the film on the characters, and they don't let him down. Anthony Michael Hall and Ally Sheedy, the least prominent cast members, stand out as the best performers. Hall, as the shy, pressure ridden A student, and Sheedy, as the reclusive, compulsive liar-kleptomaniac-weirdo, communicate much more of their characters with much less dialogue. Though the spotlight is on the more vocal characters, who form a fairly antagonistic trio, the film really concentrates on how all



Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy, Emilio Estevez, Molly Ringwald, and Anthony Michael Hall are *The Breakfast Club*.

five form a special bond. Small, entertaining bits of business, like when they all burst into whistling the Colonel Bogey March, signal the emergence of a common bond, one that holds together through the day as they begin to look out for each other.

The Breakfast Club is a more mature film than *Sixteen Candles*, which was wonderful in its own wild, crazy way. *The Breakfast Club* spends less time on gimmicky gags and clever soundtrack cues, though, and concentrates on genuine character exploration and

the natural humor of people. It isn't without its crazy moments—Judd Nelson creeping through the school crawlspaces as he tells a joke to himself, Emilio Estevez doing a gymnastic routine after getting high in a small library cubicle, Sheedy making a horrendous Mayonaise-Kool Aid-Cap'n Crunch sandwich, and eating it—but they are subordinated to the story, which has its moment of compassion and poignancy intermixed with the humor.

Hughes only goes a little overboard in one scene, where the soul cleansing confessions have the tears streaming the cheeks of the players a little too long. But he soon gets the picture back under control for a nice conclusion that captures the truth of the characters.

The Breakfast Club is simply marvelous, a funny, wild, honest film about real teenagers and real problems. Just because it's serious doesn't mean it can't be funny, and John Hughes proves it. Maybe the industry will take a hint from Hughes and start presenting films that are as honest and energetic and wonderfully funny as his, but until then this is the only place in town that serves the real thing.

—Sean Axmaker

Review:

Mrs. Soffel

Directed by Gillian Armstrong; written by Ron Nyswaner; starring Diane Keaton, Mel Gibson, Matthew Modine.

Mrs. Soffel is a simple case of romantic fluff with pretensions to something more meaningful. Based on a true story (which is supposed to mean something to us, I suppose), it is a predictable, under-developed tale of doomed romance set in the hazy, picturesque period of 1901.

Diane Keaton stars as Kate Soffel, the God-fearing wife of straight-laced, humorless prison warden Peter Soffel (Edward Herrmann). A dedicated prison missionary, she visits the inmates

every Tuesday and Thursday to pass on the good word. A pair of inmates on death row, the Biddle brothers, fascinate her. Modern folk heroes, Eddie (Mel Gibson) is a handsome, polite "good boy gone bad" with a following among the young ladies in the town (who gather outside the prison walls to protest his innocence), and his younger brother Jack (Matthew Modine) is a kid in over his head, devoted to his brother but not too aware of what he stands for.

Kate quite predictably falls for the cynical, solid Eddie and helps the two escape. Eddie, however, falls for Kate and won't leave her behind. The three take off for Canada with the authorities on their tail and minor conflicts to keep the trip "interesting."

About this time the viewer should be aware that the film isn't

going anywhere. The most interesting elements of the film—Kate's religious fervor which Eddie brings into question, the Robin Hood appeal of the Biddles, the "miscarriage of justice" constantly brought up in the script—are left far behind, half explored then forgotten. Only the meager personality conflicts and rather tepid romance are left to spice up the mundane chase, and it leaves it quite bland.

Australian director Gillian Armstrong, late of the wonderful musical comedy *Starstruck*, tries to make the film look more interesting than it is. The film opens on the Soffel family almost exclusively in tight close-ups, a study of faces that hints at some serious character exploration. Such is not the case. Keaton and Gibson are stuck in lifeless, undeveloped roles

and they fail to bring much to them. Their romantic scenes just sit there, showing little chemistry between either the actors or their characters. Only Modine's performance shows any spark. As an immature young man a little fed up with his older brother's domination, yet still very much in admiration of him, Modine brings Jack's confusion and frustration to life in a quirky, studied performance.

Mrs. Soffel isn't a bad film; gorgeous cinematography, decent performances and even direction make it watchable and entertaining, at least for the first hour. But it doesn't really go anywhere, and the first half isn't enough to satisfy by itself. At its core, *Mrs. Soffel* isn't much more than well made romantic sop.

—Sean Axmaker

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NOW SHOWING

Amadeus: Mozart's music becomes a character in this lavishly filmed story of the playfully brazen child-man Mozart (Tom Hulce) and his mediocre musical rival Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham). Cinema World (342-6536).

Beverly Hills Cop: Eddie Murphy is a Detroit cop who comes to Beverly Hills to solve the murder of his best friend. Directed by Martin Brest (*Going in Style*). Mayflower (345-1022) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Breakfast Club: Five high school students meet in the morning to spend the day in detention together and the antics of "The Breakfast Club" begin. John (Sixteen Candles) Hughes directs. Stars Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall (*Sixteen Candles*), Emilio Estevez (*The Outsiders*, *Repo Man*), Ally Sheedy (*War Games*) and Rick Moranis (*Ghostbusters*) as the janitor. National (344-3431).

Brother From Another Planet: Science-fiction comedy from versatile writer-director John Sayles (*The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, *Lianna*, *Baby, It's You*). A black alien from Outer Space (Joe Morton) crashes near Harlem and is pursued through Manhattan by extraterrestrial bounty hunters. (Sayles plays the fair-haired bad guy in black.) Bijou (686-2458).

City Heat: Burt Reynolds and Clint Eastwood play private eye and cop in this 30's gangster thing. Shows with *Garbo Talks* at the Fine Arts (747-2201).

Cotton Club: Francis Ford Coppola's lavish music, dance, gangster extravaganza. Co-written with Pulitzer-prize winning novelist Wm. Kennedy. The stories are drawn from *The Cotton Club*, a New York prohibition-era speakeasy. Stars Richard Gere, Gregory Hines, Dianne Lane, Lonette McKee. Oakway (342-5351).

The Falcon and the Snowman: True story of young idealist Christopher John Boyce, who, while working for TRX Corporation in 1974, decided (with friend Andrew Dalton Lee) to sell U.S. spy satellite data to the Soviets. Timothy Hutton (*Ordinary People*, *Iceman*) plays Boyce, and Sean Penn (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Bad Boys*) plays Lee. Directed by John Schlesinger (*Yanks*). Cinema World (342-6536).

Fast Forward: Kids and dancing. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Garbo Talks: A loyal son sets out on an impossible mission to grant his mother's dying wish: she wants to meet her idol, Greta Garbo. Ron Silver (*Silkwood*, *Best Friends*) is the son. Anne Bancroft plays the mother. Directed by Sidney Lumet. Shows with *City Heat* at the Fine Arts (747-2201).

Heaven Help Us: The Brothers at St. Basil School preach against vice, lust and disrespect, but it never stops these guys. Donald Sutherland, John Heard. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Improper Conduct: Documentary. Cuban refugees, homosexuals in particular, give a pic-

ture of Cuban society, myths and revolution. Directed by cinematographer Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez-Leal. Shows with *The Times of Harvey Milk*. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

The Killing Fields: This British film shows the transformation of Cambodia into a concentration camp after the American evacuation from Saigon. The true story of N.Y. Times correspondent Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston) and his Cambodian interpreter-friend Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor). The men were separated and the journalist spent years trying to find Pran, who had been interred in the camps of the Khmer Rouge—the Killing Fields. British stage director Roland Joffe makes his film directorial debut. McDonald (344-4343).

The Mean Season: Kurt Russell and Muriel Hemingway. She's girlfriend to a newspaper man covering a murder story. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Mrs. Soffel: A true story. In 1902 a warden's beautiful Victorian wife (Diane Keaton) fell in love with a handsome inmate (Mel Gibson) of the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh and helped him escape. Script by Ron Nyswaner, directed by Australian Gillian Armstrong (*My Brilliant Career*). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

A Passage to India: Set in a richly colored, politically fragile British Colonial India (1926), the story is an impassioned treatment of racially forbidden loves—one a deep and honorable friendship between two men, Indian Dr. Aziz and British schoolmaster Fielding (Victor Banerjee and James Fox); the other a forbidden yet uncontrollable connection between the vibrant Dr. Aziz and the beautiful Adele Quested (Judy Davis, *My Brilliant Career*). West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Purple Rain: Bijou Late Nite (686-2458).

The Times of Harvey Milk: A 1984 documentary of the murder of Harvey Milk, the first gay supervisor elected to office in San Francisco's history. Shows with *Improper Conduct* at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Turk: Timothy Hutton (*Ordinary People*, *Iceman*, *Snowman* and *The Falcon*) is a guy fighting the law. West 11th Tri (342-4142).

Vision Quest: Cinema World (342-6536).

Witness: Stars Harrison Ford (*Indiana Jones*). Cinema World (342-6536).

—S.R.

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