

Review: Stranger Than Paradise

Written and directed by Jim Jarmusch;
with John Lurie, Eszter Balint, Richard
Edson.

Stranger Than Paradise is stranger than most any film you'll see this year. Writer/director Jim Jarmusch displays a wry, dry sense of humor that is apt to leave a general audience cold but has already found a small but strong following on the East coast and is likely to do the same here.

Stranger is the antithesis of last year's cult hit *Repo Man*. Where *Repo* is stuffed full of satirical barbs in every frame and rife with interweaving plot strands, *Stranger* is austere and simple, examining in scientific detail the ordinary lives of three odd people. Willie (John Lurie) is a fully Americanized Hungarian living in New York, the black sheep of a family he no longer considers himself part of. He is duly informed that his younger cousin Eva (Eszter Balint) from Hungary will spend ten days with him before continuing on to her Aunt's house in Cleveland. With the introduction of Willie's best friend, the not-too-bright De Niro-esque Eddie (Richard Edson), the trio is complete and the nominal adventures begin.

Jarmusch allows these events to unfold in a less than usual manner. Shot in grainy black and white, each individual shot constitutes a small scene in itself, with a short cushion of black between every single shot (actually this isn't quite true; somewhere along the chain of moviehouses this print has traveled, a projectionist



Eddie, Eva and Willie contemplate their next move on the winter shores of Southern Florida, in Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise*.

cut out the black that began the different reels, probably taking it for extra leader. As a result, there are a few direct cuts, but rest assured the filmmaker didn't put them there).

In addition to this oddity in style, Jarmusch plays the deadpan scenes for what seems to be an overextended amount of time. Eva and Willie discuss his TV dinners and the theory of American eating habits, dig through the booty Eva gathered shoplifting, and, especially, watch TV, all in long scenes with an unmoving camera, forcing the viewer to dwell on the mundane details of these people's lives with surprisingly funny results. Something starts the audience tittering, possibly the absolute craziness of this style, but more likely the accuracy of this vision. When the audience is into the pace and style of the film, the humor is more accessible and the slightest thing can set it off. It's a weird, understated, uncharacteristic form of humor but Jarmusch makes it work: through

his tightly controlled style, through the sharp, strangely beautiful photography impeccably composed by Tom Dicillo, through the magnificently austere dialogue and odd plot turns, and through the deadpan performances by the main actors.

Stranger Than Paradise is not for everybody. It isn't as wickedly satirical as *Repo Man* or as playfully silly as *This Is Spinal Tap*, but it has a unique look and a special flavor all its own. Everything about the film seems so right, from the recurring song "I Put a Spell on You" by Screamin' Jay Hawkins (as Eva says, "He's a wild man, so bug off") to the wicked conclusion that could only have been the work of a perversely humored God or a twisted writer/director. I go with the latter; Jarmusch has a film that will find its audience, and though it may not be as large as, say, the one that found *Ghostbusters*, it will be large enough to let him know he did something right.

—Sean Axmaker

NOW SHOWING

Amadeus: Received the Oscar for Best Picture. F. Murray Abraham won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Antonio Salieri, Mozart's insanely jealous and musically inferior competitor. Based on the play by Peter Shaffer and directed by Milos Forman, the film was shot partly on location in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Regardless of its historical accuracy, the film is an entertaining honoring of artistic genius, and makes the music of Mozart accessible to the masses. Mayflower (345-1022).

Baby—Secret of the Lost Legend: From Disney Studios, a cute little dinosaur is discovered in Africa. Springfield Quad (726-9073) and West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Beverly Hills Cop: Eddie Murphy is the jive-talking Detroit cop trying to solve a murder in Beverly Hills. Cinema World (342-6536).

Blood Simple: A Texas tavern owner hires a sweaty private detective (M. Emmet Walsh) to kill his wife and her lover. The *S.F. Chronicle* calls this a "genuine spine tingler, crisscrossed with slashes of droll, offbeat wit." Pauline Kael calls it "pulpy yet art conscious" and says there are plenty of "film noir in-jokes." Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Breakfast Club: Parents, teenagers and folks who were once teens might enjoy this sensitive story about five teenagers from different social strata who come together for a day at Saturday detention and learn something about each other. Shows with *Sixteen Candles* at the Fine Arts (747-2201).

Care Bears: Animated tale about a mythical land called care-a-lot. Carol King sings the title song, Mickey Rooney plays the voice of Mr. Cherrywood. West 11th (342-4142), Springfield Quad (776-9073).

The Cat's Eye: Stephen King's new horror film. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Desperately Seeking Susan: Romantic adventure. Madonna makes her film debut as a rock star who is desperately chased by her boyfriend (Robert Joy). Rosanna Arquette is the bored housewife who imitates the rock star to the point of believing she is the star. Directed by Susan Seidelman (*Smithereens*). Springfield Quad (726-9073) and Cinema World (342-6536).

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*, *Ice Man*) plays Boyce, and Sean Penn (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Bad Boys*) plays Lee. Directed by John Schlesinger (*Yanks*). Shows with *Vision Quest* at the Oakway (342-5351).

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. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Ladyhawke: Medieval Romance. Rutger Hauer (the evil replicant in *Blade Runner*) is the dashing swordsman Navarre who suffers from the unrequited love of the fair Isabeau (Michelle Pfeiffer, *Scarface*). John Wood (*Wargames*) is her rejected jealous lover who bestows a curse which transforms Isabeau to a hawk by day and Navarre to a wolf by night. Directed by Richard Donner (*The Omen*, *Superman*). Cinema World (342-6536).

The Last Dragon: Karate-comedy. Aimed at the PG-13 crowd. A love story-comedy about a guy who wants to be like Bruce Lee. Shows with *Porky's Revenge* at Cinema World (342-6536).

Mask: In her first lead role, Cher plays a fast-tracking single mother of a diseased and disfigured teenage son (Eric Stoltz). Because they both live outside the boundaries of polite society (his disfigured face, her biker friends), theirs is a mutually dependent relationship full of courage, pain and fun. Directed by Peter Bogdanovich (*The Last Picture Show*, *They All Laughed*). National (344-3431).

A Matter of Heart: C.G. Jung. Shows April 15-18. Made in 1983 by Mark Whitney. An inspiring portrait of the life of psychology giant Carl Jung. Interviews with those who knew him personally provide an exploration of the man and his work with psyche, soul and drama. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Once Upon a Time in America: April 12-14 ONLY. Oregon Premiere. Robert DeNiro is the lead in an all-star cast in this epic saga of a group of gangsters from 1923 to 1968. Sergio Leone directs. Cinema 7 (683-0733).

Porky's Revenge: Shows with *Last Dragon*. Cinema World (342-6536).

Police Academy II: McDonald (344-4343).

Return of the Jedi: Luke Skywalker confronts Darth Vader in a struggle to free the galaxy. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Sixteen Candles: Parents forget their daughter's birthday and she sits home during one of the rowdiest teen parties in cinema. Shows with *Breakfast Club* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

Stranger Than Paradise: A funny, weird tale of a young Hungarian emigrant and her two deadbeat buddies. A shaggy-dog story made in Cleveland, Florida and Manhattan. The aimless lives of this group are made funny and entertaining by the low-key humor of director Jim Jarmusch. Bijou (686-2458).

The Terminator: Arnold Schwarzenegger is the perfect robot-beast from the future sent back to kill the woman (Linda Hamilton) who will bear humanity's white knight. Both dreadful and comic images of life after the nuclear holocaust. Non-stop action and scary stuff. Bijou Late Nite (686-2458).

Vision Quest: Romantic comedy. A teenager is trying to win a wrestling scholarship to college and a girl disturbs his concentration. Shows with *Falcon & Snowman* at Oakway (342-5351).

Witness: An American detective-love story from the Australian master of subliminal tension, Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave*, *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*). Cultures clash as a 20th century police department meets 17th century agrarian-religious culture. Lukas Haas (*Testament*) is a young Amish boy who witnesses a murder. Investigating detective Harrison Ford discovers that police colleagues are involved in the murder, and hides out with the boy and his mother (Kelly McGillis, *Reuben, Reuben*) in Pennsylvania Amish Country, while a plan is devised. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

—S.R.

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"A RICH, FUNNY TALE OF UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS. The film's ending pulls everything together with such unstudied clockwork that it's worthy of O'Henry. If my hunch is right, 'Stranger Than Paradise' will become one of those hits out of left field like 'My Dinner with Andre.'"

—Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun Times

"BRILLIANT AND HIGHLY ORIGINAL. A very, very funny film which resists rational description as strongly as it resists pigeonholing."

—Shelia Benson, Los Angeles Times

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A FILM BY JIM JARMUSCH

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