

CINEMA

Review: Purple Rose of Cairo

Written and directed by Woody Allen; with Mia Farrow, Jeff Daniels, Danny Aiello, Edward Hermann, John Wood.

Anyone can fall in love with a fictional character on the silver screen, but how often do you see a fictional character fall for someone in the audience? *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is Woody Allen's hymn to escapism, his exploration of the relationship between fantasy and reality, an absurdist look at a serious subject.

The place is New Jersey, the time, Depression Era. Cecilia (Mia Farrow) is a disillusioned romantic scraping by with a waitressing job at a local cafe. Her husband Monk (Danny Aiello) is an insensitive brute who's lost hope and spends his days pitching pennies with the rest of the neighborhood's unemployed. Cecilia has no love life at home and hates her work; she lives her life vicariously at the

local cinema, where she gets a new dose of the beautiful life and happy endings every week, just enough hope to keep her going.

When things just get too tough, she treats herself to a whole day of the latest fantasy romance, "The Purple Rose of Cairo." There, during the fifth showing, she thinks she sees supporting character Tom Baxter (Jeff Daniels) look at her. . . .

It would be unfair to give any more of the plot away. Suffice it to say that the plot turns on one of the most absurd twists to appear in an Allen comedy since his early days. But this is mature Allen. This time the craziness is serving a very serious story, a mix of social comment, cynicism and absurdity that, for all its bleak turns, comes up optimistic and heartwarming in a strangely endearing way.

Like last year's *Broadway Danny Rose*, *Purple Rose* is about down-and-outs, an entire country of them in fact, embodied in the waif-like figure of Cecilia. She is anything but the self-effacing personality that usually takes the spotlight in Allen's films. Self-conscious, brow-beaten, unhappy, Cecilia represents the people

who turn to fantasy for happiness because there simply is no alternative. Stuck in a dead end life with an inconsiderate husband, the movies are not a bad alternative. At least she can escape to wonderland for a few hours. When her fantasy lover comes along, a perfect man in every way, she accepts him even while knowing it cannot last forever.

If all this sounds very serious and pretentious, keep in mind that Allen's comedy is at its most bizarre here. The lines between fantasy and reality break down with hilarious results, and Jeff Daniels marvelously conveys two radically different views of Hollywood fantasy, as the fictional movie character Tom Baxter, and as the up and coming movie actor Gil Shepard.

Allen's dialogue is as clever and sharp as ever and his timing is impeccable. Cinematographer Gordon Willis, a long-time Allen collaborator, finds a simple, unassuming look for the visuals, matching the picture's tone marvelously.

The Purple Rose of Cairo is another triumph for Woody Allen. Heartbreaking, sweet and just plain hilarious, Allen's charm has done anything but diminish in recent years. Like *Broadway Danny Rose* before it, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is a "little" film with a lot more substance than its bigger counterparts.

—Sean Axmaker

Postscript

Although I found *Purple Rose* to be absolutely wonderful, I'm less enthusiastic about the actual viewing experience. It's just too bad that this film has to be playing at the McDonald theater, notorious for its atrocious sound system and consistent projection screw-ups. I was appalled at the time spent to re-align a reel, and I never quite got all of the dialogue. For a film so caught up in the exploration of cinema fantasy and reality, a projection blunder can easily destroy the carefully crafted illusion and mar the filmgoing experience. There isn't much hope of the film moving to a better theater, though, so my advice is to see it and then complain about the problems, loudly. If enough people make clear their position, something might get done.

—S.A.

Review: What You Take For Granted...

Produced, directed, written and edited by Michelle Citron.

Docudrama is an interesting format for creating tension and informing the audience. In this case, forty women were interviewed and composite characters were created for the film to express how it feels to be a woman working in jobs dominated by men.

There is also a story line—the developing friendship between two of the women who also document how it is to work in their fields (a doctor and a truck driver). The other "characters" who describe their work experiences are a cable splicer, a carpenter, a sculptor and a philosophy professor.

All these women are successful in their fields and have found their work rewarding in various ways. However, we hear a lot about the price they are paying to be where they are. The carpenter says her choice was "between shit women's work for shit pay, or shit man's work for more pay!"

The sculptor describes how she finally expressed her pent-up anger at a fellow worker who had been insensitive to her for a long time. She says he changed "instantly." It's one of the better stories in the film. In contrast, the doctor tells about letting her anger out towards fellow pediatricians who nervously laugh about young rape victims and tell "sordid stories." She is reported to "the Director" who lectures her about controlling her emotions. How many times have you heard that one?

The philosophy professor, who is also black, says white males are never forced to see any reality but their own. As a woman, a black and a worker in a male dominated field, she sees at least those three realities. She goes on to describe what she calls "fogging," something women do in the workplace. She says they just won't see or hear what's going on; they create a fog around themselves. They do this in order to avoid dealing with their anger or taking responsibility for their perceptions.

Because the interviews are spiced up with the drama—the unlikely friendship of the doctor and the truck driver—you stay personally involved in the film. The story seems to be saying, "Well, we've got each other, and that, at least, is a real plus."

—Lucia McKelvey

NOW SHOWING

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*). 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).

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. Cherywood. West 11th (342-4142). Springfield Quad (776-9073).

Comfort and Joy: Scotland's comedic director Jill Forsyth weaves an amiable tale about total war between Glasgow's ice cream trucks. A good natured film where even the vandals love their fellow man. Bijou (686-2458). Call for showtimes.

Creature: West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Desperately Seeking Susan: A good girl-bad girl social satire that offers rock star Madonna as the Manhattan queen of sleaze whose glitter, street-wise lifestyle is coveted by a bored, virginal New Jersey housewife who is married to a hot tub king. Someone aptly described this film as a "New Wave Alice in Wonderland." Susan Seidelman directed (her first film was *Smitherens*). Aidan Quinn (*Reckless*) plays the handsome projectionist Dez. Not a heavy message film, just a lot of fun. Cinema World (342-6536) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Falcon and the Snowman: True story of young idealist Christopher John Boyce, who, while working for TRW 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 Fine Arts (747-2201).

Just One of the Guys: A girl wants to be a football player. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

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. Oakway (342-5351).

Ladyhawk: 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).

Live Matinee: Local comedy. Fridays (April 26 and May 3), 7:30 and 9:30 pm. \$3.99. Saturday matinees only April 27 and May 4, 2 pm. \$2.99. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Lost in America: Albert Brooks wrote, directed and acted in this funny, Winnebago-Easy Rider comedy about a Yupwardly mobile couple who quit their high-paying L.A. jobs, buy a winnebago with a microwave, and hit the road to "find themselves." Julie Hagerty is the pretty, baby-voiced wife. Brooks is an exciting comic talent and the film is worth seeing if only to experience him. Here is a film that had the potential of a *Big Chill*, but I'm afraid *Lost in America* got a little lost on the cutting room floor. Cinema World (342-6536).

Mask: Cher is the perfect biker mama in this "Elephant Man" (true-life) story about a teenage boy with a horribly disfigured face. Newcomer Eric Stoltz (*The Wild Life*) is sensitive and poignant as the misfit whose mother's love gives him the courage to live. Cher is tough and funny and sweet. The bikers give the film its comic relief, and provide a support community of misfits in which Mom and son live, work and play. National (344-3431).

Moving Violations: From the creators of *Police Academy*, a parody of driving schools. West 11th Tri (342-4142).

Purple Rose of Cairo: An entertaining and thought-provoking parable from Woody Allen about the movies and what they are—for the creators and the audiences. Mia Farrow plays an insecure 30's waitress who is trapped in a marriage to a jerk, and rather than leave him, escapes at the movies. One day her film hero (Jeff Daniels) actually walks off the screen and into her arms. The rest is pure Allen cleverness and magic. McDonald (344-4343).

Secret Honor: Robert Altman's film of a play about Richard Nixon shows Nixon getting drunk and making THE TAPES. Arnold Stone and Donald Freed wrote the play. Philip Baker Hall plays the insipid Nixon. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Vision Quest: Romantic comedy. A teenager is trying to win a wrestling scholarship to college and a girl disturbs his concentration. Shows with *Falcon and the Snowman* at Fine Arts (747-2201). —S.R.

What's Happening apologizes for the omission of films in recent listings. We aim for accuracy, but our information is provided by theatres and does not always reach us by deadline.

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