

Birdy

Directed by Alan Parker; screenplay by Sandy Kroopf and Jack Behr; based on the novel by William Wharton; with Nicholas Cage, Matthew Modine.

"All I care about is birds. I'm getting so I don't care about the outside world."

The line is spoken by the aptly named Birdy (Matthew Modine), a Philly kid with an obsession with birds and flying that alienates about everybody except his best friend Al (Nicholas Cage). Together these two crazy kids do typical growing up things—build a birdhouse to raise and train carrier pigeons (which they hope to sell to neighbor kids), overhaul a clunker jalopy and take rides (illegally) to the beach, and try out Birdy's homemade wings.

But the idyllic days of boyhood in Philadelphia don't last forever. The Vietnam war comes, and Birdy returns from it more than wounded. In his catatonic state he simply crouches silently in his cell looking out the window, invariably at the flocks of birds flying past his window. Birdy is a bird, and only Al has realized it. Called up at the Vets hospital where his face has undergone reconstructive surgery, Birdy's authoritarian physician Dr. Weiss (John Harkins) hopes that Al's presence

might shake Birdy out of shock. But Al is under a deadline; if Weiss doesn't see any progress Al will be sent back to his hospital and Birdy is off to a sanitarium—for good. As Weiss tells Al, "The Army takes care of their own."

Birdy is another in a long line of war trauma films (remember *Coming Home*?) but the war aspect is played down for the most part, except for a few obligatory scenes. Al, for instance, is heard muttering, "Any other war we would have been heroes," and as the film progresses we get a few flashbacks from both Al and Birdy, all to show us that war really is hell. Was there any doubt?

The film is at its best when concentrating on the relationship between the two boys. Both Modine and Cage give wonderful performances, full of life and vigor, whether the scenes are in Philadelphia, circa late fifties, or in the stateside hospital after the war, where Modine pulls off an amazingly emotive performance through subtle gestures and glances without losing the believability of his catatonia.

Alan Parker directs with a sure hand and has a marvelous visual style, but something vital seems missing from the film, something beyond the story and the characters. For all of my respect for Parker, he really is nothing more than a remarkably able craftsman

who keeps within the traditions of the Hollywood narrative. For example, the scenes in the hospital cell are shot from a few key camera set ups, most obviously from a position perched overhead looking down on the characters or conversely flat on the floor looking up at the action. Visually it looks beautiful but thematically there isn't any reason for these positions. The result is a handsome but pretentious visual style which looks more "important" than it really is.

Most aggravating about *Birdy* is a manipulative rip-off ending, but until that moment the film is a wonderful visual treat. Parker keeps the film paced quickly but evenly and balances the intercutting between Philly and the hospital intelligently. Only the Vietnam flashbacks get in the way of the structure but even that can be overlooked in light of the rest of the picture.

Birdy is not brilliant, but it is damn good. Although we never do get inside of Birdy's head to discover what the obsession is all about, we do get a nice study of a relationship and a lot of good natured fun mixed in with the heavy (though not bothersome) pathos of the post-war scenes. All in all, it's a fine production of a good tale that shouldn't disappoint anyone.

—Sean Axmaker

NOW SHOWING

A Nos Amours (To Our Loves): In a bold and elliptical fashion, French director Maurice Pialat presents the story of a teenage girl's change, from a moody child at summer camp, to a self-made sex object. Sandrine Bonnaire plays the girl whose escape into sexuality ("It's the only time," she says, "when I can forget everything, when I can forget myself.") completely disrupts the life of her restrictive family. Pialat himself plays the father, with Evelyn Ker as the mother. Not shown with *Phar Lap*. Separate admissions. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Baby, Secret of the Lost Legend: Shows with *Pete's Dragon* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

Beverly Hills Cop: Shows with *Police Academy II* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Birdy: Childhood friends Birdy and Al return from Vietnam with their respective emotional and physical scars. Based on the novel by William Wharton, this is a story of psychological mystery and broken dreams. Matthew Modine (*Vision Quest*, *Mrs. Soffel*) plays Birdy, a pathetic yet who thinks he can fly. Nicholas Cage (*Shoot the Moon*, *Rumble Fish*) plays his friend Al, whose love and devotion help Birdy face a difficult reality. A long film. Earle music by Peter Gabriel. Directed by Alan Parker (*Midnight Express*, *Fame*, *Shoot the Moon*). At Cinema World (342-6536).

Brewster's Millions: Richard Pryor is a baseball player who is bequeathed \$30 million on the condition that he spend it all in 30 days. McDonald (344-4343).

Cat's Eye: Stephen King's new horror flick. Cinema World (342-6536).

Code of Silence: "If damage is your cup of meat, you should check this one out." (Michael Dare, *L.A. Weekly*) Chuck Norris is a combination Clint Eastwood/John Wayne, always obliged to kill hundreds of people (in the name of righteousness, of course). In this case, the bloodbath is to avenge a friend's death and to save the girl. Shows with *Terminator* at West 11th (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 (Rosanna Arquette) 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 *Smillie's*). Aidan Quinn (*Reckless*) plays the handsome projectionist Dez. Not a heavy message film, just a lot of fun. Mayflower (345-1022).

Fletch: Comedy. Chevy Chase is a newspaper reporter who assumes many and varied disguises to get the story. Cinema World (342-6536).

Goonies: Steven Spielberg (executive producer on this one) has kept the story a secret. What happens to this group of adventuresome kids from the Northwest? Shot in Astoria, OR. Directed by Ric Donner (*Omen*, *Superman*). Shows at the National (344-3431).

Just One of the Guys: Comedy. A girl (Joyce Hyser) who feels she's being treated as a second-class student, disguises herself as a boy, falls in love with her best male buddy (making complications for him) and volleys teenage one-liners with

her little brother throughout the film. Young teens seem to laugh at this movie directed by Lisa Gottlieb. Shows with *Lost in America* at the Oakway (342-5351).

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." Shows with *Just One of the Guys* at Oakway (342-5351).

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. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Nightmare on Elm Street: Some good special effects. The "thing" attacks the girl when she falls asleep. Scary. Cinema World (342-6536) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Paris Texas: Nobody does "On the Road America" like West German director Wim Wenders. (*Recall Kings of the Road* and *Alice in the Cities*.) In this story, a displaced man (who is presumed dead) returns home after a mysterious four-year disappearance to find his wife gone and his brother and sister-in-law parenting his child. Harry Dean Stanton (the sleazy car-repo guy in *Repo Man*) gives a brilliant performance as the lost father trying to reclaim his identity. Hunter Carson plays the irresistible child; with Nastassja Kinski as the wife, Dean Stockwell as the sensitive brother and Aurore Clement as the sister-in-law. (This film won the top award at Cannes in 1984). Written by Wenders, Sam Shepard and Kit Carson. Bijou (686-2458).

Perfect: John Travolta plays a reporter investigating the health-spa life, where there's reported to be more sex than sweat. Directed by James Bridges. Cinema World (342-6536).

Pete's Dragon: Disney film about a boy who sees a dragon no one else can see. Shows with *Baby* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

Phar Lap: Held over. Story of a famous Australian horse who overcame illness and became a symbol of hope for depression-era Australia. Directed by Simon Wincer (*The Man from Snowy River*), with Ron Liebman, Tom Burlinson, Martin Vaughan. Does not show with *A Nos Amours*; separate admissions. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Police Academy II: Shows with *Beverly Hills Cop* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Rambo—First Blood Part II: If you liked *Code of Silence*, you'll love *Rambo*. This film picks up where *First Blood* left off—that is, with Sylvester Stallone in prison for shooting apart a whole town. The government hires Rambo ('cuz he's tough) to go to Vietnam and get proof of POW's. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Return of the Soldier: From Rebecca West's 1918 novel. Directed by Alan Bridges. A shell-shocked captain (Alan Bates) has amnesia and has forgotten 20 years of his life. The three women who love him (Julie Christie, Glenda Jackson and Ann Margaret) consider confronting him with the awful truth or leaving him in his innocently childish and happy state. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Romancing the Stone: Kathleen Turner (*Body Heat*, *A Breed Apart*, *The Man with Two Brains*) plays a strait-laced writer who with mercenary-rogue Michael Douglas (the film's producer) searches the jungles of Columbia to find her missing sister. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

The Terminator: Futuristic saga of a destroyer robotic and the forces of good who attempt to thwart him. Arnold Schwarzenegger is surprisingly exciting as the scary villain. Shows with *Code of Silence*. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

A View to Kill: James Bond (Roger Moore) engages in mortal battle with a psychotic industrialist (Christopher Walken, *Brainstorm*) and Villainess Grace Jones to save Silicon Valley from being captured, blown-up and GASP! tumbled into the ocean. Springfield Quad (726-9073) and Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Yellow Hair: West 11th (342-4142).

—S.R.

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