

True Stories

Review by Lois Wadsworth

David Byrne's witty travelogue takes you from one end of Virgil, Texas, to the other. Along the way, he introduces you to some of the zanies who inhabit the place. As he says, "People here are inventing their own system of belief."

Beneath the brim of his black cowboy hat, the man with the intense, familiar gaze looks upon the barren prairie town. He's the Narrator, and it's through him that we will meet some of the rather strange people who live here, the ones who will act out their stories in short snippets of fantasy and song in the loosest plot structure of any feature length film I've seen.

David Byrne, the lead singer of the Talking Heads and star of *Stop Making Sense*, makes his directorial debut with this picture. As the Narrator, he ties the whole shebang together—well, sort of, together. As the *L.A. Weekly* notes: "It's an image salad, presided over by the mystic nerd that Byrne has oiled to perfection."

Early on we meet Louis Frye (played by John Goodman) who just wants to find a wife. In fact, he advertises for one on TV, the guy is so desperate. Eventually his quest leads him to the "Cute Woman" whose little, cutesie, snuggly house is chock full of Care Bear cuddliness and sweetness, but they don't hit it off. He finds his true love in the "Lazy Woman" (Swoosie Kurtz) who is so rich that she doesn't have to get up, and they get married in her fully equipped high-tech bed.

Another female in Frye's life, the "Lying Woman," Jo Harvey Allen, has the best lines in the

show. Musician Tito Larriva (formerly of the Plugz, now with the Cruzados) plays Ramon. Larriva adds his special talent to a rousing group lip-sync rendition of *Wild, Wild Life* staged in a nightclub. The Narrator has an outrageous dinner with a couple of civic-minded do-gooders (Spalding Gray and Anne McEnroe) who haven't spoken to each other for years, although they are married and live together with their children.

As you watch the locals strut their stuff in the night club act, a comic-grotesque fashion show featuring Astro Turf clothes for the whole family, a gospel choir sing-along about politics and economics, and an outrageous small-town talent show, you realize that you are deep in the heart of David Byrne's *City of Dreams*:

"We live in the city of dreams
We drive on the highway of fire
Should we awake
And find it gone
Remember this, our favorite song."

Don't expect too much from *True Stories*—it's a funny piece, but very light; a comment on our times, but very gentle. The director's film sensibility is not as self-assured or brassy as his wired performance with the Talking Heads would lead you to expect. In its cover story on Byrne, *Time* magazine says Virgil, Texas, is "between Dallas and Paris, Texas.... In the cozy heart of Reagan's America, the renegade spirit stirs." David Byrne takes a new look at small town reality, and pronounces it good.

Radio Days

Review by Richard Wilen

There once was a time, so I am told, when there was no TV, when America had a love affair with another medium, the radio. In *Radio Days* director Woody Allen attempts to capture the memories of the days of radio before they were lost. Taking us back to Rockaway, New York ca. 1938 to 1945, Allen conjures up his version of the glamour and attraction of pre-TV radio.

With Woody reminiscing, the film alternates between his family's addiction to the radio and anecdotes about radio shows and personalities. As he tells his rambling story we are treated to a fast-paced series of humorous vignettes.

Populated with the usual raft of oddball characters that are Woody Allen's trademark, these carefully crafted vignettes are loosely linked situation comedies which follow several plots. But the plot is never really the point; it's the celebration of early radio that is the goal.

Radio Days is a very campy and nostalgic film. Filling the airwaves with the forerunners of TV game shows, soap operas, eye-witness newscasts, sporting events, and the music of the 1930's and 40's, the film revels in those days of yesteryear when radio was king. The music in particular stands out with lots of great tunes, running from the big band sound to the rumba.

With its tongue-in-cheek realism, and slightly spoofing attitude, the film provides light-hearted amusement with little of Allen's recent penchant for painfully exploring the foibles of contemporary life. No messages, just good fun.

Woody Allen fans will recognize many of the people who pop up in various roles from his earlier efforts. Mia Farrow is featured

prominently once again, this time as Sally White, a poor cigarette girl who overcomes her whiny voice and plebeian background to become a cultured reporter.

Diane Wiest gives us one of her better performances as Woody's aunt, an honest working girl just trying to meet Mr. Right. Her amorous adventures provide a constant chuckle. Along the way we also get cameo appearances by Tony Roberts, Jeff Daniels, Diane Keaton, Danny Aiello and Wallace Shawn. Seth Green and Julie Kavner give good performances as Woody's childhood alter-ego, Joe, and his mother.

In making his films over the years, Allen has managed to assemble a modern-day version of the Shakespearean troupe. As in days of old this ensemble offers up a varied playbill with the actors trading off roles. Some of their films are serious, some are adventurous, some slapstick, some avant garde. *Radio Days* is part of the lighter, variety show fare in their repertoire.

This ensemble style is an important part of Allen's method, one that has worked well for him over the years. But it does have a drawback—Allen tends to overwork certain characters and certain performers. Sometimes you feel like you've seen a bit too much of it before. There is some of that in this film, but as usual we're having too much fun to really care.

While I don't think *Radio Days* will be as widely acclaimed as *Hannah and Her Sisters*, it is a very good film nevertheless. This is one of those Woody Allen films that may initially be considered a minor event, but will grow on audiences who appreciate Allen's more subtle craftsmanship.

now showing

Black Widow: A woman feigns friendship with a suspected husband-killer in an effort to learn the truth. Stars Debra Winger and Theresa Russell (*Insignificance*). McDonald (344-4343).

Children of a Lesser God: William Hurt (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*) stars as a teacher of the deaf in this adaptation of the award-winning play. West 11th (342-4142).

Crimes of the Heart: Dramatic comedy. Three sisters reunite and consider their various notorious lives. Stars Oscar winners Diane Keaton, Sissy Spacek, and Jessica Lange. Shows with *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Crocodile Dundee: A celebrated Aussie adventurer, naive to city ways, is still spending time in the Big Apple. Oakway (342-5351).

52 Pick-Up: A wealthy businessman fights back against blackmailers who threaten his career and his wife's political future. Stars Roy Scheider and Ann-Margret. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

From the Hip: Comedy. A young lawyer's unruly, but winning, tactics are challenged by a tough case and disapproving superiors. Stars Judd Nelson (*St. Elmo's Fire*). Shows with *Over the Top* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Hannah and Her Sisters: Romantic comedy. Relationships, desires, and problems of well-off Manhattanites, as presented by Woody Allen. Shows with *Crimes of the Heart*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Hoosiers: A "washed up" basketball coach tries for a comeback as head of a small high school team. Stars Gene Hackman and Barbara Hershey. Cinema World (342-6536).

Light of Day: This drama of family conflict includes a film debut by Joan Jett. Michael J. Fox plays her brother in a bar scene band. Gena Rowlands is the troubling mama. Shows with *Little Shop of Horrors* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Little Shop of Horrors: Rick Moranis (*Ghostbusters*) takes on Steve Martin in this wacky musical romance about a bloodthirsty flower. Shows with *Light of Day*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Mannequin: Can a handsome young actor find true romance with a department store dummy? Andrew McCarthy finds out. West 11th (342-4142).

Menage: French comedy, with a twist. Gerard Depardieu plays a hoodlum in a roundabout romance with a down-and-out couple. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Nightmare on Elm St. 3: Third in the series! Did I miss something? Cinema World (342-6536).

Outrageous Fortune: A pair of women search for their two-timing lover, who has mysteriously disappeared. Bette Midler and Shelley Long star in this cross-country comedy. Cinema World (342-6536).

Over the Top: Sylvester Stallone's latest big-muscle showcase. Here he plays an entrant in a wrist wrestling contest who is trying to get his son back. Shows with *From the Hip* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Peggy Sue Got Married: A woman awakens in her past, and has a chance to alter her future life. Stars Kathleen Turner (*Jewel of the Nile*). Directed by Francis Coppola (*The Cotton Club*). Fine Arts (747-2201).

Platoon: A day-by-day G.I. perspective of the Vietnam war. Directed by Oliver Stone (*Salvador*), who received a Purple Heart in 1967. National (344-3431).

Radio Days: This remembrance of scenes past reveals the effect of early radio shows upon a child's unglamorous family. Directed and narrated by an off-camera Woody Allen. Cinema World (342-6536).

A Room with a View: A young Englishwoman, during her proper Victorian finishing, has to choose between her dignified fiancé and an unorthodox artist. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Some Kind of Wonderful: A young man is divided in his affections. A "teen" film from John Hughes. Stars Eric Stoltz (*Mask*) and Lea Thompson (*Back to the Future*). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Star Trek IV: More adventure for Kirk and crew. This episode brings them back to our present to help us do what we alone cannot—survive! West 11th (342-4142).

Top Gun: Tom Cruise trains to be a hot-shot fighter pilot when he's not relaxing with Kelly McGinnis. Bijou (686-2458).

True Stories: Odd and eccentric personalities in a fictional Texas town are the focus of the tales herein. A film by the Talking Heads' David Byrne. Bijou (686-2458).

—Some Kind of Michael Sussman

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