

Brighton Beach Memoirs

Review by Deborah McGee

Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* is a play with wide appeal: enough comedy to keep ears pricked, enough profanity and talk of sex to make it modern, and enough pondering of what life is all about to please most viewers. Lane Community College's production is classy and generally well-done. *Memoirs* is a recent autobiographical comedy by Neil Simon, about a Brooklyn family during the Depression, as seen through the eyes of the youngest teenage son.

In his first time directing an LCC play, Jerald Seifert appears a serious contender to fill Ragozino's shoes. The casting of the play's narrator and main character, Eugene, is a pivotal one, and Seifert made the right choice with South Eugene high school senior Martin Hynes. He's someone to watch. Hynes has warmth and charm and with more confidence will muffle fewer lines. He manages to take a certain type—similar to roles done by both smart-mouth Matthew Broderick and always-young-Jewish kid from NY Woody Allen—and create something new. At one point in the play, Eugene's mother and aunt are engaged in

quite listenable dialogue. Hynes gives the audience a sly wink 20 feet from the action, and we see it. He already knows how to connect with an audience.

Mark Layman makes an admirable, kindly father. As Mom, Sharon Sless is the cast's most successful at ethnic authenticity, and withchutzpah: Check out the difference in her face between her publicity photo in the program and her on-stage persona. WOW. Hynes and Sless definitely were the audience's favorites Saturday night.

Deborah Sackett is believable and lovely as Nora, the live-in cousin for whom Eugene lusts. She and Nicole Kitterman as Blanche, her mother, handle skillfully the scene when mother-daughter conflicts come to a head. Sackett plays the repressed dynamo of an adolescent female in a way showing dramatic potential for Theater's heaviest roles. Stanley, Eugene's older brother, is played by David Mendenhall, who rivals Hynes at times with his charm. Nothing in the play is funnier than when Stanley explains to Eugene all he knows—and doesn't know—about the female gender. Jackie Stein rounds out the cast as

Laurie, the sniveling little sis.

Both Simon and the Depression Era recently have been done on celluloid, and I was interested to see what effect the arts of the popular culture might have on this production. Hynes' portrayal of Eugene seems to take the best of all worlds, and adds a freshness beyond that. LCC's production is an affirmation of the ability of drama to take us to a whole new moment in time. Interestingly, some production aspects seem to have been enhanced by exposure to other media, such as the technicolor transformation of Blanche, and a greater authenticity of set and accent than one might expect.

Another intriguing thing about seeing Simon is the primal quality of his work, its affirmation of persistently ape-like traits of human beings. It's like he's saying, "In spite of everything, human beings love each other." It's a friendly spot in the Arts. You scratch my back—I'll find your lice kind of thing. Primate snuggling appeals as the family structure is broadened and affirmed: Not only do auntie and her two daughters also live with the nuclear ones, a whole boatload of relatives fleeing Poland is due, and gladly will be welcomed. At heart, LCC's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* says with a sly wink, "One will provide."

Richard Harris's set has a pleasant softness of lighting, and is properly elaborate. The shiny black poodle statuette on a shelf is the perfect kitsch accent. It was enjoyable to see Judith Harrison's '30s-ish costumes, especially the nice two-toned combo of aqua, and earrings and hairstyle on Blanche, a woman emerging from a cocoon, dressed gorgeously for a date. Blocking of scenes needed some more work, so that backs were turned less toward side wings of the audience.

Brighton Beach Memoirs ends its run Sunday. Check *What's Happening's* calendar for details.

April 23, 24, 25,
30, May 1, 2
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SCAN LINES Video Reviews by Sean Axmaker

The Best of April New Releases

The Fly

The Fly, less a remake than a radical reinterpretation of the 1958 classic, stars Jeff Goldblum as a brilliant but reclusive researcher puzzling the problem of instantaneous transportation. Geena Davis is a science reporter duly impressed by his working model, which successfully transports one of her nylons across the room. A healthy romance kindles as Davis agrees to chronicle his efforts to make the system compatible with living flesh. And thus our story begins.

More than a horror picture, Canadian director David Cronenberg (*Scanners*, *The Dead Zone*) provides a touching love story at the core of the film. Prompted by jealousy and a touch of drink, Goldblum transports himself in an improved model but in the process melds his reconstructed genes with those of an unknown passenger, a common housefly. The story becomes a modern variation of *Beauty and the Beast*, with a disturbing personality shift accompanying Goldblum's physical change. Love keeps him going at first but is slowly twisted at the latter stages of his horrifying (and sometimes disgusting) transformation.

Marked by a sublimely black sense of humor and marvelous performances (where was Goldblum's Oscar nomination?), *The Fly* is an intelligent picture, not for the faint of heart but certainly one of the best and boldest films of 1986.

Blue Velvet

Blue Velvet is one of those films you either love or hate. Set in the quintessential Norman Rockwell small town of Lumberton, young Kyle MacLachlan comes home to a side of his town he never dreamed existed when he stumbles across a severed human ear in an empty lot. Playing boy detective, what begins as a giddy sleuthing adventure (with his all American girl Laura Dern) quickly plunges our hero into a nightmarish world of murder, cruelty and sadistic sexual power, a world MacLachlan finds perversely fascinating. With a foot in both worlds he tries to balance malt shop dating with Dern and sexual adventure with

exotic chanteuse Isabelle Rossellini until he comes face to face with evil incarnate himself: Dennis Hopper at his foul mouthed best.

Writer/director David Lynch (*Eraserhead*, *Elephant Man*) provides an ironic context with his picture postcard small town, throwing the viewer off balance with slow motion photography, uneasy angles and bizarre images. By night Lynch peels away the picket fences and rose gardens to reveal the undercurrent of repressed desires and unchecked id giving the town its sense of unease.

It's MacLachlan's attraction to this hidden world, however, that gives the film its disturbing edge. As a stand-in for us he enacts our voyeuristic participation in the film. Perhaps this is why so many people dislike *Blue Velvet*—the self implication challenges an easy enjoyment of the cinematic portrayals of sex and violence. *Blue Velvet* is a sleeper hit for those who like their cinema challenging.

Room With a View

Nightmares and agents of evil give way to comedy and summer romance in *A Room With a View*. Adapted from the E.M. Forster novel by director James Ivory and screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (the team behind *Heat and Dust* and *The Bostonians*), *A Room with a View* is certainly the most charming film of the year, boasting a slyly witty screenplay, lush photography and a fine set of performances.

A young woman's summer excursion to Florence finds an unlikely romance with a headstrong lad. Helena Bonham Carter, however, chaperoned by her nervous aunt Maggie Smith, is betrothed to the prissy but likeable Daniel Day Lewis back in Britain. This summer fling is further compounded when the forward Julian Sand's eccentric uncle Denholm Elliot moves to Carter's country village.

A comedy of mores and manners, *A Room with a View* is a delightful picture with a wry sense of humor and a genuine love for all of its characters. Ivory's firm directorial hand guides the film gently and easily and draws the performers into a tight ensemble. Intelligent and witty, *A Room with a View* would go nicely with a dry wine on a cool evening.

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