

Films

9 to 5
Starring Jane Fonda
Lily Tomlin, Dolly Parton
Directed by Colin Higgins
National Theater, Downtown
Mall

Anyone who's ever held a nine-to-five job, with its dull routine accompanied by an occasional spicy scandal, will be disappointed if they expect a "statement" from 9 to 5. But all you nine-to-fivers looking for a little break in the routine (off at five, dinner at six, show at seven) may find it a funny time-out before another day of up, out, and on the job.

9 to 5 is a good movie, but it only tugs at the problems working secretaries (mostly women) face. That's okay with me. I'd been led to expect more — a "real look" at office oppression — but I wasn't disappointed with what I got: A fairly good story, and some excellent comedy delivered the right way at the right time.

Lily Tomlin plays Violet Newstead, a bright, competent executive secretary who is consistently overlooked at promotion time in favor of her dull, incompetent male counterparts. Judy Bernly (Jane Fonda) has just reentered the working world after getting dumped by her husband, in favor of — who else — *his secretary*. Dolly Parton, in her first film role as Doralee Rhoades, the boss' personal secretary, is voluptuous, sweet-natured, and a victim of the rumors that assume she's having an affair with the boss.

One night the three find themselves together and spin wild fantasies of revenge to even the score with the boss (played with plenty of male chauvinist pig sexism by Dabney Coleman). In the fantasy

sequence, induced by some good pot, Violet's particular form of revenge is the sweetest evil, and one of the funnier moments in the film. Eventually, the trio gets the opportunity to kidnap the boss and make some changes in office procedures, and herein lies the essence of the story.

The problem here is a dependency by director Colin Higgins to rely on slapstick to get a laugh. He uses too many gimmicks, such as the fantasy sequence, to move his plot. The idea is good, but the cartoonish method makes the story hokey and amateur.

Violet's "mistake" with Coleman's coffee, upon which the whole story hinges, is so implausible that the film loses any credibility as a serious look at working women. Don't pay much attention to the story — concentrate on Tomlin, Fonda, and Parton, who manage to give good performances despite Higgins' reliance on junky film tricks.

Parton has a natural screen presence, and a fine touch in delivering the right line at the right moment. Doralee Rhoades is really Dolly Parton behind a desk. But Parton is so delightful that it doesn't matter: She may not be an actress, but she's a fine comedienne. There's a sweetness about her that somehow doesn't turn to sap.

Tomlin is an established comedy veteran, and here, as in many of her stage characters, she's the sharp edge. She's at her best when she spits out a bit of venom to her boss, the other secretaries, and her duller partners. Violet is the brain behind the scam. A cool operator, her years of playing office politics have finally paid off.

Fonda, not a bad comedienne



Dolly Parton portrays the boss' secretary in 9 to 5 now playing at the National Theater.

Photo courtesy of 20th Century-Fox

herself in the right part, has the flimsiest role. In 9 to 5 we're supposed to believe she's not terribly bright or practical, and that's tough to take. There's too much intelligence showing for anyone to believe that she's ever been inept at anything. It's tough to be dumb; she shouldn't even try.

All three have the courtesy not to upstage the others, so the acting is nicely balanced. Each has a distinct style, both in character and screen presence, but the effort at a nice mix suc-

ceeds. It's obvious they had a good time making this film, and it shows, which makes it a lot more fun to watch (and easier to ignore the shortcomings).

There is some light social criticism of office working conditions. After kidnapping the boss, the trio institutes flexible hours, child care and office decorating, and of course, higher pay. Commendable, but not terribly serious. There's a lot more to alleviating job oppression than putting plants on the desks and yanking out the time

clock.

But if there's more to being a good secretary than taking fast shorthand and pouring a good cup of coffee, these three have it. They not only type and file, they're devious. A good boss should recognize a shrewd brain, even if it's encased in platinum blonde hair. Their kidnapping scheme, combined with blackmail and a little extortion, is stunning because it's so easy. As they say, it's all in a day's work.

By Sally Oljar

Popeye
Starring Robin Williams
and Shelley Duvall
Directed by Robert Altman
Springfield Cinema

In *Popeye*, director Robert Altman, writer-cartoonist Jules Feiffer, and cinematographer Guiseppe Rotunno have gone to elaborate lengths to bring a cartoon to real life.

It's a novel idea. The opening scenes introduce the shantytown of Sweet Haven, a kind of cozy collection of shambles full of people whose expressions are exaggerated and whose actions produce sounds like *bo-ing!*

Keeping an open mind, one hopes that Altman's *Popeye* is not as dumb as it seems. But it is, and the movie quickly loses its appeal after some initial charm.

Popeye does have its good points — especially on the physical level. The few fight scenes are fun to watch, because, like in *Superman*, the comic book impossibilities are believable: people shaped like wheels roll down stairs, crunch their bodies up, drill through solid wood, and fly through the air with the greatest ease.

Robin Williams' appearance as the sailor man with hairy, bulging forearms, squinted eye, and corncob pipe, bears little resemblance to his television role as Mork from Ork. It's hard to picture anyone but Williams in the title role of *Popeye* — his muttered witticisms full of catchy grammatical flaws (for example: "house of ill *repukes*") come off in true Williams' ad-lib humor.

Both he and Shelley Duvall (Olive Oyl) are remarkably faith-

ful to their penned predecessors. It's a credit to their acting abilities that they could pull off their roles so well. And Altman's grandson as Swee'pea steals scenes from both of them.

But the context seems wrong. These are cartoon characters in a real-life world. There is a clash of realities. Altman's *Popeye* doesn't work as a cartoon, and it doesn't work as a live action comedy.

There are a few musical numbers, intentionally uninspired: Olive Oyl can't sing or dance. But the songs generally don't add much to the story, so it doesn't work as a musical either.

The plot elements are basic: boy meets girl; boy likes girl; boy fights big, bad, bully boyfriend of girl. Conflicts are black and white, good and bad. "Wrong is wrong even when it helps yeh,"

Popeye says out of the corner of his mouth. Fighting the villainous Bluto, Popeye says matter-of-factly that he will win because good always does.

Altman's films are often fragmented. *Popeye* isn't as disjointed as *Nashville*, but, paradoxically, it's less coherent. *Popeye* is episodic. One thing follows another, often to predictable conclusions, without a sense of natural progression.

The last scene is almost anti-

climactic, as Popeye and his allies pursue Bluto across the waves to an island to rescue Olive and Swee'pea. One hesitates to call it a chase scene because it's slow, boring, and predictable.

Despite this critical conflagration, *Popeye* is generally a fun show with some interesting elements. Potentially possessing the right stuff, the film tries hard. But it doesn't quite make it.

By Richard Laliberte

Here we go again! Yet another foggy — edging toward smoggy — day in Eugene, Oregon, home of the University of Oregon and the Oregon Daily Emerald. . . what more could you want in a city? Well, welcome back — yeah, I know, it's been a week since school started, but, well, we haven't *communicated* in over a month. Time to catch up: In case you've forgotten, deadline for calendar and general entertainment stuff is the Thursday before publication. I realize most people have a hard time getting their stuff in, but please do try! Thanks. Finally, I'd like to go through the traditional thank you's, etc. First off, to Sandy for letting me change days: next to Kirk Knighton, our new beloved copy-editor with a funky, but stylish zipper on his running suit who is so very patient with bad grammar, and finally, to Heidi her timing and letting me escape for lunch. See you next week! Erzsi.

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