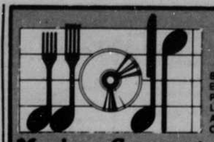

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☐ MOVIES

'Moonstruck' offers warmth, wit and wisdom

By D. M. Holiman
Emerald Contributor

In the best comedies, the supporting characters are as funny as the lead characters, if not funnier. "Moonstruck," the romantic comedy about an Italian family written by a man of Irish descent and directed by a man of Jewish heritage, has delightful supporting characters who provide more than their share of laughs.

"Moonstruck" is about a woman named Loretta (Cher) whose first marriage was cursed with bad luck that culminated in the death of her husband, who was run over by a bus. Now, seven years later, she has decided to play it safe and marry Johnny (Danny Aiello), a man she doesn't love, but whom she admits she does like.

Her betrothed however, has to jet off to Sicily to pay his last respects to his dying mother. Before leaving, Johnny asks Loretta to convince his brother Ronny (Nicolas Cage) to forget the bad blood between them and attend the wedding.

Loretta complies with Johnny's wish, and when she goes to see Ronny, she discovers the source of enmity between the brothers: Ronny blames Johnny for the loss of both his hand and his fiancee.

Initially hostile toward Loretta, Ronny soon becomes smitten with her. He pursues her, and she submits to his advances during a night with a full moon. Before Loretta knows it, she's in love with the younger brother of the man she is engaged to marry.

In addition to the humorous dialogue and characters, "'Moonstruck" has considerable charm as a romance. Unlike so many films that derive their humor from ridiculing their characters or being juvenile, "Moonstruck" is able to both make fun of and affirm its characters' romantic aspirations.

That's not to say that "Moonstruck" is sentimental. It avoids that weakness by employing sardonic humor as well as sweetness. The characters in the film speak their mind, offend one another, argue, and lament over the vicissitudes of life, as well as wax poetic and romantic under the influence of a full moon or an opera by Verdi.

The cast, from the leads Cher and Cage to the supporting players (especially Dukakis), gives excellent performances. The screenplay by John Patrick Shanley is witty, warm and even wise.

Courtesy Photo

The eccentric family members of "Moonstruck" include, (seated, from left) Nicholas Cage, Cher, Feodor Chaliapin and (standing, from left) Julie Bovasso, Olympia Dukakis, Louis Guess, Vincent Gardenia and Danny Aiello.

Murphy's overdone obscenities make 'Raw' unpalatable

By Sean Axmaker
Emerald Contributor

Eddie Murphy can be hilarious in the right circumstances. In "48 Hours" and "Trading Places" he worked with good material, although it was his timing and delivery that made the difference. On "Saturday Night Live" his characters were clever and well developed, and the ensemble setting gave him the opportunity to both act and react.

He usually was the center of attention, even if he wasn't the only thing holding it all together.

Not so lately. Even Murphy couldn't save weak material in films like "Best Defense," "The Golden Child," and "Beverley Hills Cop II." On his own as a stand-up comic in the concert film "Raw," Murphy ultimately succeeds or fails on his material, and unless a parade of his trademark obscenities mixed in with a few funny lines puts you in stiches, he may just let you down again.

"Raw" is designed to cash in on raunch, and that's an interesting hook. Without a doubt, it sometimes works well, adding a needed punch to a line or establishing a character. In the funniest bit of the show, where Murphy does dead-on impressions of Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor, the language is the focus of the gag.

His first extended monologue has Cosby pussyfooting around until he finally blurts out the dreaded "F" word, absolutely incongruous behavior for TV's perfect dad. Murphy follows this with Pryor's expletive-studded response. In the right context the words themselves are funny because they are taboo.

Unfortunately, Murphy figures the right moment extends from curtain to curtain, and the joke wears very thin barely half an hour into the film. Delivery only works to a point, and even his best laugh getters are overused.

The material gets more and more offensive, and even giving him the benefit of a doubt, it becomes clear there are few comedians as overtly sexist (and proud of it) as Murphy. He uses the word "bitch" so much that he finally resorts to "woman" to avoid being too repetitious.

For a concert film, the direction is good. Robert Townsend keeps his cuts and shots unobtrusive, playing to the performance. With nary a reaction shot (a welcome relief), the camera doesn't leave Murphy, and the editing matches the comic's own rhythm and timing. Without a doubt, this is Murphy's show all the way, and he, not Townsend, must take the blame.

I stopped laughing less than halfway through the film. The stream of sexual references, scatology and racial slurs is almost continuous, and he finishes with a drawn-out monologue (playing his father) that runs out of steam long before Murphy runs out of breath.

It isn't that Murphy isn't funny, it's that he can't make unfunny jokes and observations work just because of who he is. Murphy is a talented performer, as "Raw" proves, but until he slips a few more jokes between the swearing and sexist slams, works harder on the material than he does on the image, and genuinely satirizes the sexist attitudes he seems caught up in, his movies will remain a low priority.

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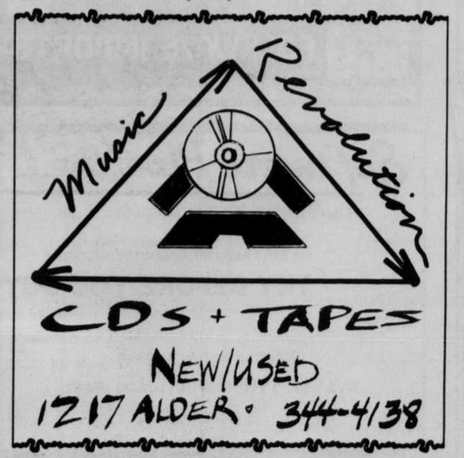

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