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**MOVIE REVIEWS**



courtesy of October Films  
"Black Cat, White Cat" has been called Felliniesque thanks to its colorful, larger-than-life characters. The movie centers around a group of gypsies who live on the banks of the Danube River. The story, about three generations of men, gamblers and hustlers, centers on the themes of "love at first sight" and longtime friendship. The film earned Bosnian-born writer/director Emir Kusturica the Silver Lion Award for Best Director at the 1998 Venice Film Festival. "Black Cat, White Cat" is currently playing at the Bijou Art Cinemas, located at 492 E. 13th Avenue.

**Living in someone else's shoes**

■ "Being John Malkovich" explores society's obsession with Hollywood-style life with a comedic flair

By Jack Clifford  
Oregon Daily Emerald

We've all played the game of "If you could be anyone else, who would it be?"

The name John Malkovich probably hasn't passed many lips in response, but writer Charlie Kaufman apparently believes that the enigmatic actor is a damn good answer, hence the new movie "Being John Malkovich."

Kaufman and director Spike Jonze have taken that body-swapping question and created the weirdest, wildest and wackiest movie since the 1992 French film "Delicatessen." The pair has also found a fresh and unique way to exploit the beaten-to-death pop culture mantra, "Andy Warhol said everyone will have 15 minutes of fame."

The movie's plot centers on four main characters: the eponymous one, of course; a veterinarian named Lotte Schwartz (a frizzy-haired Cameron Diaz), who has a soft spot for a chimp named Elijah; Maxine (Catherine Keener), a wisecracking woman with a nose for moneymaking schemes; and Lotte's husband Craig (John Cusack), who works hard at his hobby of puppeteering, yet has to suffer indignities such as being told he's not sexually attractive because he still plays with dolls.

Using the art of puppetry as a foundation, a home base in a way, Kaufman and Jonze get their movie to lift off like a spaceship once the portal to John Malkovich is discovered, and moviegoers can only ooh, ahh and laugh uproariously at the trippy sights.

At first, the on-screen travelers are limited to Craig and Lotte, who are in a battle to woo the oh-so-not-smitten-with-either-one Maxine. Until they inhabit John Malkovich's being, that is, then Maxine can't get enough of them.

Once the potential for financial gain is realized, thanks to Maxine's more rational side, literally everyone wants to take the ride. That's when the movie really gets strange.

In a scene that ranks as one of the best ever filmed, Malkovich takes a journey to be, well, himself. And you thought this guy played some

odd roles in his past movies.

This film couldn't have been made without John Malkovich's presence, which isn't meant to point out the obvious — after all, the movie is called "Being John Malkovich." The implication here is that no other fairly mainstream actor, male or female, could make viewers believe that something like this, as absurd as the idea is, might happen to him or her. "Being Jodie Foster"? No. "Being Johnny Depp"? Nope. Even "Being Kevin Spacey" doesn't sound right.

Only Malkovich fits the role and the story of how Jonze talked him into filling it would probably make a pretty decent movie, as well.

Back to this movie, however, which also sort of loses track about two-thirds of the way through.

Although Orson Bean does a nice turn early on in the movie as Craig's boss, Mr. Lester, his eventual importance to the plot and increased screen exposure starts to drag the film down a bit.

In addition, when we lose Cusack's sad sack Schwartz to Malkovich's inner self, the movie is set adrift without its anchor. Cusack as an actor just keeps getting better and his role here continues that progress.

Diaz and Keener are above average in their portrayals as Lotte and Maxine, who end up representing one of the movie's deeper themes about gender identity and how confusing the entire issue can be. Mary Kay Place, in a smaller, more comedic role, works well as a secretary with an ear for malapropisms.

On the whole, this flick is just one laugh after another. Yet, when you leave the theater, it will have you thinking about such ideas as our culture's insidious love affair with all things celebrity-oriented and society's search for immortality.

From a pop culture perspective though, the film is just one treat after another, especially with its sometimes quick star cameos. So forget "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," because "Being John Malkovich" is the coolest fad around.

"Being John Malkovich" plays at the Bijou Art Cinemas.



Being John Malkovich  
Starring John Cusack, Cameron Diaz, Catherine Keener, John Malkovich  
Directed by Spike Jonze.  
★★★★☆

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