

Politics, pathos, love, humor, desperation: a little something for most of us this month

Several fine foreign films, an espionage thriller
and a couple of nostalgia films make for entertaining choices

BY ELEANOR MALIN

Law of Desire

Carmen Maura steams up the celluloid as Tina Quintero, transsexual sister (she used to be his brother) of Pablo Quintero. Tina

Cinema

is an actress in her brother's play, step-mother to precocious Ada, child of Tina's former lesbian lover. Ada has a crush on Pablo, who is an immensely popular erotic film director, famous

gay male and cocaine sniffer. What is amazing is how normal this all seemed. The family unit seemed so stable for the three individuals. Brother and sister work together well, though the passionate and opinionated Tina is anything but easy to handle. Everything Tina does seems perfect. Product of surgery though she may be, she personifies woman at her best, however filled with longing and loneliness, loss and original pain (if not original sin).

The main characters here are romantic, energetic, attractive. The humor is crisp and abundant. Moving from a romantic comedy to a suspense thriller, the ending, strange as it is, does fit the tone of the rest of plot.

Shadey

Incest, castration, sex translation, slavery, torture, and dangerous politics — *Shadey* is billed as a dark comedy; it's more like a greige dreamlo, the likes of which English film-makers do so well.

The film, very early, shows Oliver Shadey (Anthony Sher), as the symbolically unattainable channel, possessing the gift of receiving information from others and putting it on 8 mm film. He tries to sell his skill to Sir Cyril Landau (Patrick MacNee), wealthy industrialist, in exchange for money to bail him out of bankruptcy and to finance an expensive sex translation operation.

A main theme here is the lack of control over our lives brought about by increasing meddling by an amalgamated techno-governmental bureaucracy — much like the situation in *Brazil*, last year's tragi-comedy which *Shadey* resembles in many ways.

Katherine Helmond, who plays sad basket case, Lady Landau, was fresh from her work on

Brazil when she was selected to play this role. She is one of our best actresses, and delivers the goods here. Make-up for some scenes was done to make her look careworn — a bit brown around the edges.

Billy Whitelaw is fun as the sadistic Dr. Cloud (Dr. Cloud, a dark individual Shadey finds himself under), impressive in men's clothes and black, 4-inch stiletto heels.

Sher is wonderful in a most clever part. He is the consummate individual who is losing control over his own destiny in favor of a punitive and amorphous government that promises reward and protection, but which, in reality, delivers taxation and recklessly endangers us.

Literate, well-acted, well lit, approach this one cautiously — it may cause some more of those pensive thoughts.

La Bamba

Introducing Lou Diamond Phillips as Ritchie Valens (ne Valenzuela), with Esai Morales as his bumptious brother Bob, and Elizabeth Pena as Rosie, Ritchie's girl friend (who was wooed and won away by bad Bob), this film is a nostalgic walk down memory lane. It's also action-packed. That Bob had a lot of energy.

The story opens with Bob one year out of prison (his mother turned him in). In a black leather jacket, riding a keen motorcycle, he gets his family (and Rosie) out of a harvesting camp and rents them a home with at least partially ill-gotten gains. Jealous of Ritchie, whose father was Steve, a full-blooded Yaqui Indian, war hero and gung-ho American citizen, Bob doesn't know who his father was. It ruffles him that the family has always had high hopes for Ritchie to be something, and undervalues him shamefully. Though Bob has plenty going for him, he can't seem to get his act together. With good art skill, he wins \$500 in prizes in an art contest, (that was a lot of money in the '50s). Disappointed that it's a drafting table and art lessons, not cash, Bob dabbles at it anyway, but has to work days hauling garbage. Bob's choices seem limited to the two options — make a go of art (a field even more competitive than popular music), or haul garbage, while drinking himself to oblivion and ruining things for his family and Rosie.

The screenplay sticks to the straight and narrow. A soupcon of mysticism adds an interesting touch; but trying to pass off the plane accident as resulting from Bob's breaking of Ritchie's lucky talisman before the fateful concert tour didn't work for me, and the tenuous thread between Ritchie's recurring nightmare of a plane crash seemed overdone. But everything else seemed right-on. The acting by all, particularly Morales and Pena, is very good. Great pains were taken to recreate the '50s California-Hispanic scene, the actors visually resemble those they play to a startling degree. The trouble Donna has trying to get her folks to let her date Ritchie, the guy of her choice, will seem like *deja vu* to a lot of women in their 40s.

Sad as may be the ending, by now known to all, this dynamic retelling of an American family, one son's blazing glory and one son's consuming frustration, is real and warm. And of course, the music, recreated by Los Lobos, is great — the crossover Mexican folk love song of the title, *La Bamba*, is plenty enough reason to make a film.

Crazy Moon

Poor little rich kid, Brooks, gets the top grades in his class, can indulge his taste in clothes (formal, retro), furnishings (nouveau flea market), music (Tommy Dorsey over and over on a hi-tech tape player), and spends his birthday money, a reward for the good grades, to buy a motorcycle with a sidecar, instead of a Trans-Am. The classic individual, he practices bizarre behavior as one of the few ways he cares to (or knows how to) communicate. He takes snapshots of dog turds and uses them to decorate his room and gross out his dad. His dad arranges a date for him with a society girl slut; Brooks fondles a mannequin he takes with him

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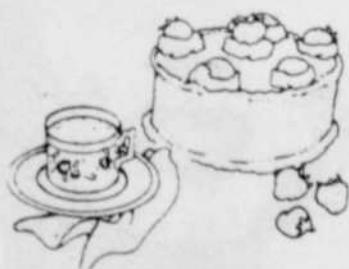


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