

'Melvin and Howard' as interesting as cornflakes

By Thomas A. Rhodes

Everyone loves "little comedies." Hollywood producers love them because they don't cost a fortune to make. Critics love them because they're without car chases, and audiences love them because they're audaciously light.

It seems that everyone is so tired of comedies of excess, that any movie that has a half-way readable script, a couple of decent performances, and anything that adds a little Lysol to the current stink of bad comedies is destined (or doomed) to be pigeon-holed, "It's 'Rocky,' 'Breaking Away,' and more. It's Brilliant!", as "My Bodyguard" was.

This same problem is arising with the newest of the "little

"M & H" is based on the tale of Melvin Dummar (Played by Paul Le Mat), the man who allegedly picked up the injured billionaire Howard Hughes (Jason Robarbs) in the middle of the desert to give him a ride one night, and found himself to be one of the 14 beneficiaries of Hughes' will. But the story is not so much of Melvin Dummar and Howard Hughes as it is of the life of Dummar. The standard loser, Dummar struggles daily to hang on to his job as a milkman as well as hang on to his wife (Mary Steenburgen).

comedies," "Melvin and Howard." Upon looking at the one-sheet in the theater and flipping through the "New York

Times," those same adjectives appear, giving the reader the clue that what he will see will compare with "Lawrence of Arabia." Unfortunately, "Melvin and Howard" ("M & H") is just another little comedy, so little in fact, that it's in danger of turning into dust.

Eventually, Steenburgen leaves him, and while co-managing a small gasoline station, an auspicious looking man leaves what looks like the will of the recently perished Howard Hughes. It seems that the late Hughes has bequeathed him \$156 million. Keeping the facts straight, Dummar doesn't reap the fortunes bequeathed him and the film ends with the nice poignant

scene between Melvin and Howard.

It's a beautiful scene to end with (the scenes between Le Mat and Robarbs are the best the film offers). Unfortunately, there are only two scenes with Melvin and Howard (at the beginning and the end), which is the main problem with "M & H." Dummar's life without Hughes (which constitutes 90 percent of the film) is pretty much standard, everyday life, which isn't worthy of 90 minutes of film. Imagine a movie about Mr. Smith before he goes to Washington and you've got "M & H."

Writer Bo Goldman (co-author of "Cocoon's Nest") is short on humor, save for a few

moments (which are delightful). Director Jonathan Demme ("Last Embrace" "Handle with Care") seemed to recognize the screenplay problem and attempted to cover up with some fancy film techniques. His camera moves almost constantly throughout the show. This may look nice, but his continual use of the Panaflex (hand held) camera and his overuse of panning shots distracted from the action and appeared as though he was hiding an insufficient script.

Flamboyant direction and cinematography work well with an equally flamboyant screenplay, such as Richard Rush's direction of Lawrence Marcus' excessive screenplay "The Stunt Man." But in "M & H," it doesn't work. With the camera flying through Roslands milk company, it was adding complexities to a scene that was fairly simple.

The performances are pretty much on the level, with Jason Robarbs and Mary Steenburgen coming off best. "M & H" isn't a bad movie by any means. It just isn't "brilliantly lyrical, or as good as American films can get."

arts briefs

Vocal music students of the Music Department will present a concert Monday in the McLoughlin Theater beginning at 7:30 p.m. The featured groups will be the Madrigal Ensemble, the Concert Choir and the Swing Choir. The Madrigal Ensemble will present some additional selections from the Baroque Period, as well as those done at the Festival of the Performing Arts; in addition, there will be classical guitar pieces, and a vocal duet by Momo Asamoto and Paul Neff. The Swing Choir will perform selections from "The Chorus Line," "Day by Day" and tunes by Billy Joel and Young. The Concert Choir will present a mixture of sacred and religious music, including Mendelssohn's "He, Watcher over Israel." Approximately 100 students will be performing. Admission is free.

Wednesday's Mini-program at noon will feature the Kingsworth Brothers, an acoustic folk-duo from Molalla. The group plays mostly original music according to Dave Buckley of Student Activities, and the start around noon in the Fireside Lounge.

On Monday at noon, Al Byron will be featured in the Fireside Lounge. Byron is from L.A. and is a veteran of many talk shows and club dates where his country/comedy style of performing has drawn wide praise. Byron will be accompanied by an electric guitar/bass player. The concert starts at noon.

All those years, all those dreams, all those sons...
one of them is going to be a star.



From Ralph Bakshi, the creator of "Fritz the Cat,"
"Heavy Traffic" and "The Lord of the Rings," comes...

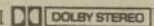
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