

Review "Blame it on Rio" major disappointment

By J. Dana Haynes
Of The Print

The sex farce has a long and illustrious history in the motion picture industry. "Blame It On Rio," which opened last weekend in Portland, will not add much to that acclaim.

"Rio" stars Michael Caine and Joseph Bologna as two middle-aged businessmen on vacation with their daughters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Like all good sex farces, the plot hinges on who does what with whom behind whose back.

Caine ("Educating Rita," "Deathtrap") is Matthew Hollis and Bologna (who was terrific as Stan "King" Kaiser in "My Favorite Year") plays Victor Lyons. They're best friends escaping for a week of merriment from their respective problems. Both problems hinge on the men's wives. Hollis' spouse Karen (Valerie Harper, TV's "Rhoda") has suddenly decided on a trial separation of one month, after a twenty-year marriage of little or no love. Lyons is being sued for divorce and deluged by her gaggle of lawyers.

For one reason or another, the men bring their daughters along. Caine's progeny Nikki (Demi Moore) hardly speaks to her dad, while Bologna's kid Jennifer (Michelle Johnson) gets along OK with him while hiding a secret crush on "Uncle Matthew." It isn't giving away any great surprise to say the crush soon becomes an affair between Caine and Johnson.

From there, it all goes pretty much according to the rules for these kinds of shows. Who knows? Who doesn't know? Who's going to get hurt? How to get out of a few sticky wickets? Etc, etc, etc.

The big disappointment in this comes not from onstage but from backstage. "Rio" was produced and co-written (with Charlie Peters) by Larry Gelbart, the creative genius behind the first six years of TV's "M*A*S*H" and the main writer of Dustin Hoffman's "Tootsie."

There are only a handful of television writers who hit home as consistently as Gelbart, whom many say was the true driving force behind "M*A*S*H." In "Rio," the characters of Matthew and Victor become sort of an updated, aged Hawkeye and Trapper John and the scenes with Caine and Bologna are pure gold.

However, the plot is paper thin and almost perfectly predictable. There's nothing even vaguely refreshing or original in the story. You've seen it, I've seen it, we've all seen it.

Another big distraction comes from Johnson as Jennifer. The reasons she was cast as the beautiful, blonde seductress/jail-bait are fairly obvious. Acting talent is not one of them. Johnson is an almost perfect Brooke Shields look-alike and sound-alike, with great legs and lovely eyes and lots of nude scenes. Every once in a while, you need a little more than that to carry a role.

Demi Moore, Caine's daughter Nikki, is quite good in a much smaller role. It's a shame she wasn't cast in the female lead, as I suspect she could well have carried it off (anyway, she looks more like Bologna than Johnson does).

Valerie Harper isn't on screen enough to judge. She was wonderfully funny in her sitcom days and can do straight drama just fine. Unfortunately, in "Rio" she's got 10 minutes in the beginning of the film and about 10 minutes in the end, and is encumbered with a harsh and unsympathetic character. It's a waste of talent, since she's obviously strong enough to carry true characterization.

On the plus side, the direction by Stanley Donen is fast and slick and the location shooting in Rio de Janeiro is phenomenal. I truly doubt one could find a more beautiful city in which to film.

Added to the crisp cinematography and Brazilian beauty is the speed-of-light banter and fine-tuned humor of Gelbart, and the terrific acting by Caine and Bologna. Sad to say, these good scores are nowhere near enough to save a crummy plot.

When the over-all level of talent is analyzed, "Blame It On Rio" is a major disappointment and may easily be avoided. It's playing (with a great deal of graphic nudity) at the Southgate theater in Milwaukie, and the Rose Moyer, Hollywood and Washington Square theaters in Portland.

The Alpha-Omega Same Time Next hit about an an- or 25 years, involv- ed, but not to each

ook at the band that shook rock

unately, with a plot as weak as people driving around England in a colorfully decorated bus, even the Beatles would have trouble making it commercially successful. As it turned out, the critics panned it and were quick to point out that the Beatles were indeed human and it was possible for them to fail at something, too. As usual the soundtrack was brilliant and it included such classics as "The Fool on the Hill" and "I Am the Walrus," but even that wasn't enough to save the movie.

The loss of Epstein was becoming more and more noticeable as the Beatles began to realize they knew nothing about how to handle the business end of music. It was apparent they needed some kind of tax shelter before Her Majesty would deplete their entire bank account. That shelter came in the form of the Apple Corporation.

Apple was a corporation that dealt with starving artists. Apple Records and Apple Films were some of the subsidiaries that offered funding for anybody who came in with a cause or an idea. The problem with Apple was that it gave away more money than it took in. Consequently the Beatles lost thousands of pounds every day on the venture. They needed somebody to come in and straighten out their messed-up finances: Enter Allen Klein.

Klein had handled some lucrative business dealings for the Rolling Stones thus Lennon was impressed. He was certain Klein could straighten out their money problems. But McCartney was skeptical. He wanted somebody he knew and trusted. Demands for a new record prevented any further discussion on the matter, therefore it was dropped and Apple continued to rob the Beatles blind.

Back in the studio a definite change was noted. Apathy among all members made working as a group a near-impossibility. Harrison complained about not ever getting any of his songs on the albums, and John was more interested in a young Japanese artist named Yoko Ono. It was Paul who took over as leader of the deteriorating group.

The end result of those recording sessions was a two-record set packaged only in plain white and titled simply "The Beatles" (White Album). This album was different in the sense that it wasn't a group effort. It was three

musicians backing up whoever happened to be singing the lead. It was also the first album released on Apple Records.

By the end of the year, the arguing within the group was virtually non-stop. Money problems continued to arise and a new manager still couldn't be found. By now McCartney was dating a photographer named Linda Eastman. Her father and brother ran a prominent law firm and McCartney was sure they'd be perfect to manage the Beatles. But by now, Lennon had convinced the other two that Klein was the right choice. It was three to one but both parties stood firm. Eventually Klein stepped in but McCartney refused to take part in any group decisions he made.

The battles that had taken place outside of the studio made working together in the studio even tougher. Filmed scenes of recording sessions in the studio that were shown in the "Let It Be" documentary, witness constant bickering between McCartney and Harrison. Furthermore, the steadfast presence of Yoko Ono symbolized Lennon's swaying devotion from the group.

Finally, something had to be done. Although they had never broken up it was obvious they could no longer function as a group. Lennon was making other albums with Yoko Ono and Paul, the one who had tried so hard for so long to keep the band together, was discussing with his new in-laws how to go about suing to dissolve the partnership.

It was then, on that April day in 1970, when every newspaper across the country splashed the headlines, "McCartney Sues Beatles," that the break-up was considered official. It was a sad day, for it not only ended the most popular rock group of all time, it also ended an era.

In the 10 years that followed the break-up, people speculated on what it would be like if the Beatles ever decided to perform together again. Would the magic still be there? Unfortunately, with the recent killing of John Lennon, that dream and hope of them one day performing together and re-kindling that spark was shattered. Looking back 20 years to when the Beatles first set foot on American soil and how they shook the entire nation and the entire world, you realize one thing: Beatlemania will live forever!

