

Sweet, Funny Valentine

Altman's ballet gets it right.

THE COMPANY: Directed by Robert Altman. Written by Barbara Turner, from a story by Turner and Neve Campbell. Produced by Joshua Astrachan, David Levy. Cinematography, Andrew Dunn. Composer, Van Dyke Parks. Art director, Gary Baugh. Film Editor, Geraldine Peroni. Choreographers Lar Lubovitch, Robert Desrosiers. Starring Neve Campbell, Malcolm McDowell, James Franco and the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago. Sony Pictures Classics, 2003. PG-13. 112 minutes.

Robert Altman's vision of a year in a contemporary ballet company is so inclusive of dance — selections from 10 ballets are performed — much of the film feels like a dream. The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago dancers appear in pieces from the company's repertoire. And dancer turned actress Neve Campbell as Ry shows that even after a 10-year absence, she can still dance on pointe.

In the centerpiece of the film, Lar Lubovitch's *My Funny Valentine*, Campbell and Joffrey dancer Domingo Rubio express the tender, sexy movements accompanying new love. The couple's sublime movements are heightened by a storm that blows in to drench them. The audience in the park stays seated until the dance is finished, then erupts in wild applause and "Bravos."

In rehearsal for the final ballet, Robert Desrosier's *The Snake*, a number of couples

enact variations of languorous moments about sexual freedom. In performance, *The Snake* dancers lavishly costumed as sleek black-and-white zebras, wild red monkeys, bushy green-leafed plants and blue-bodied celestial deities cavort in surrealistic fashion across the stage. For the finale, a giant, visible only by his huge, greedy face, devours the dancers and rolls his (mechanical) eyes.

The first performance as the film opens is a contemporary abstract piece called *Tensile Involvement*, choreographed by Alwin Nikolais, accompanied by synthesizer music. The dancers handle several lengths of wide ribbon, which form arresting visual combinations on the stage. My favorite formation has individual dancers lying on their backs enclosed in a rectangle of ribbon, rocking from side-to-side in time to the music.

The Company doesn't really have a plot. We follow Ry through her life away from the ballet, where she devotes an amazing amount of energy yet still absorbs a lot of physical pain. She finds out from others that her boyfriend is sleeping with another dancer. Her mother comes to visit and offers advice. Ry works as a waitress in a club. She meets a chef, Josh (James Franco), whose job is equally demanding. They become lovers.



Dancers Ry (Neve Campbell) and Domingo (Domingo Rubio) in Lar Lubovitch's *My Funny Valentine*.

MATT DINERSTEIN, SONY PICTURES CLASSICS, 2003

Little about the private life of the film's other dominant character, Alberto Antonelli (Malcolm McDowell), surfaces. He runs the Joffrey with characteristic genius and ego, calls the dancers "babies," and is more interested in the emotional content of their work than the step-by-step perfectionism. He leaves that to the ballet mistresses and masters. Loosely based on the ballet company's co-founder and director Gerald Arpino, Antonelli is a great role for McDowell. My favorite scene takes place at an award banquet for Italian Americans, where Antonelli tells "you Italian men" not to make life so hard for boys who want to dance ballet. It's

an Altman moment.

Arpino watched much of the film being made. "Robert Altman really directs the way I choreograph," Arpino said, noting that the director lets the dancers be part of the process. "But he always knows, just as I do, the exact moment, frame, movement that he wants to capture in order to project his vision and goals."

If you love dance, you are in for a treat with this film. Likewise, if you love Altman's pictures, this is one of his most relaxed yet highly observant films. The combination works because Altman "gets" dance, and *The Company* shows it. Highly recommended, opens at the Bijou March 19. **EW**

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING: **Club Dread, Broken Lizard's:** From the makers of *Super Troopers* comes the tale of a non-stop party at an island resort. Stars Bill Paxton and members of Broken Lizards. R. Movies 12.

Company, The: Robert Altman's dream of a dance movie stars the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago, Neve Campbell, Malcolm MacDowell. One of Altman's most relaxed yet highly observant films. He "gets" dance, and *The Company* shows it. Highly recommended. PG-13. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Dawn of the Dead: Remake of George Romero's 1978 cult classic about a shopping mall taken over by those trying to survive a zombie plague. Unlikely stars: the excellent Sarah Polley (*My Life Without Me*) and Ving Rhames. R. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Highly acclaimed film directed by Michel Gondry from screenplay by Charlie Kaufman (*Adaptation*). Stars Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet, Tom Wilkinson, with Mark Ruffalo, Elijah Wood, Kirsten Dunst. Carrey discovers Winslet had memories of their relationship erased. Now he wants to do the same. Or does he? R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Girl Next Door, The: Trying again: Emile Hirsch and Elisha Cuthbert (Kim Bauer of "24") star in Luke Greenfield's teen comedy, romance. R. Sneak at 7:30 pm on 3/20. Cinemark.

House of Sand and Fog: Eugene premiere of 2004 Academy Award contender for actor, Ben Kingsley; supporting actress, Iranian star Shohreh Aghdashloo; original score, James Horner. Vadim Perelman's film stars Jennifer Connelly. *The NY Times* says the film has a deeper understanding of tragedy than either *Mystic River* or *21 Grams*: "Like *Antigone*, it is the story of two rights adding up to a monstrous wrong." R. Movies 12.

Perfect Score, The: Cast includes Erika Christensen and Scarlett Johansson in tale of six high-school students who band together to heist the SAT. PG-13. Movies 12.

Taking Lives: All-star cast includes Angelina Jolie, Ethan Hawke, Keifer Sutherland, Olivier Martinez and Jean-Hughes Anglade. Directed by D.J. Caruso, this thriller is about a serial killer who steals his victims' identities. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Torque: Biker Cary Ford (Martin Henderson) returns to see his girlfriend, Shane (Monet Mazur), but they

get caught up with some bad bikers. Also stars Adam Scott, Ice Cube, Jay Hernandez. PG-13. Movies 12.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:

Agent Cody Banks 2 Destination London: Frankie Muniz returns as spy Cody Banks, this time he's undercover in London as a student at an elite boarding school. PG. Cinemark.

Along Came Polly: Ben Stiller plays Reuben, a hapless husband whose bride dumps him. Then he meets up with a childhood friend, Polly (Jennifer Aniston). Also stars Philip Seymour Hoffman, Hank Azaria, Bryan Brown and Alec Baldwin. John Hamburg directs. PG-13. Movies 12.

Blade Runner: Director's cut released last year of Ridley Scott's 1982 futuristic adventure set in Los Angeles is "now seen as a nightmarish blueprint of the '80s and beyond," *The NY Times* notes. Harrison Ford plays a cynical former cop on the trail of deadly android replicants. With Rutger Hauer, Sean Young, Darryl Hannah, Edward James Olmos. R.

Butterfly Effect: The trailer is about a young man (Ashton Kutcher) who time travels back to the past to fix the broken lives of a childhood girlfriend (Amy Smart) and his friends, Lenny (Eldoen Henson) and Tommy (William Lee Scott). R. Movies 12.

Cheaper by the Dozen: Steve Martin and Bonnie Hunt play the parents of 12 children, including Piper Perabo, Hilary Duff and Tom Welling. Directed by Shawn Levy. PG. Movies 12.

Fifty First Dates: Drew Barrymore and Adam Sandler in a romance with a catch: she has no short-term memory recall, so she forgets him every night. Also stars Rob Schneider, Sean Astin and Dan Aykroyd. Directed by Peter Segal. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Online archives.**

Haunted Mansion: Eddie Murphy stars in Rob Minkoff's (*Stuart Little*) ghost comedy, with Jennifer Tilly, Don Knotts, Terence Stamp PG. Movies 12.

Hidalgo: Based on autobiography of distance rider Frank T. Hopkins, played by Viggo Mortensen, this epic action-adventure takes place during a 3,000 mile survival race across the Arabian Desert in 1890. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Last Samurai, The: Edward Zwick directs this action-adventure starring Tom Cruise as a bitter Civil War vet in China to train emperor's troops to defeat samurais. Captured by warrior Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe), he learns Samurai traditions and code of honor.2003 Academy Award noms: Watanabe, Supporting Actor; art direction; sound mixing; costume design. R. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Lord of the Rings: Return of the King: Peter Jackson's stunning work stars Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Billy Boyd, Orlando Bloom, Liv Tyler, Cate Blanchett. Frodo and Sam make it to Mount Doom as Aragorn leads the warriors of Middle Earth in the final battle against Sauron. 2003 Academy Award sweeps for Best Picture; Director, Peter Jackson; adapted screenplay; art direction; sound mixing; original score; original song; costume design; film editing; makeup; and visual effects. Very highest recommendations. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

Master and Commander The Far side of the World: Peter Weir brings Patrick O'Brian's best-selling nautical adventures during the Napoleonic era to the screen, with Russell Crowe as Captain Jack Aubrey and Paul Bettany as Dr. Stephen Maturin, ship surgeon and

naturalist. Very highest recommendations. Academy Awards for cinematography, sound editing; nominated for picture; director; art direction; sound mixing; costume design; film editing; makeup; visual effects. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Monster: Patty Jenkins' film about real-life killer Aileen Wuornos stars Charlize Theron, who not only captures Wuornos's fragile hold on human decency but also show that her tough exterior is the only buffer she has between her marginal life and an uncaring world. Co-stars Christina Ricci. Hard-to-watch violence. 2003 Academy Award for Theron, Best Actress. R. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

Passion of Christ, The (2004): Mel Gibson film opens amid charges (denied) of anti-Semitism. A.O. Scott of *The New York Times* writes, "'The Passion of the Christ' is so relentlessly focused on the savagery of Jesus' final hours that this film seems to arise less from love than from wrath, and to succeed more in assaulting the spirit than in uplifting it." Others call the graphic torture unwatchable. R. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Paycheck: Based on a Philip K. Dick sci-fi short story and directed by John Woo, film stars Ben Affleck, Uma Thurman Aaron Eckhart, Paul Giamatti, Colm Feore, Michael C.

Hall. PG-13. Movies 12.

Peter Pan: Directed by P.J. Hogan, movie stars Jason Isaacs, Jeremy Sumpter, Richard Briers, Olivia Williams, Lyn Redgrave, Ludvine Sagnier and Rachel Hurd-Wood. PG. Movies 12.

Secret Window: Psychotic (John Turturro) stalks writer (Johnny Depp), accusing him of stealing the ending to his story. David Koepp directs, story by Stephen King. Also stars Maria Bello, timothy Hutton, Charles S. Dutton. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Something's Gotta Give: Directed by Nancy Meyers. Harry Sanborn (Jack Nicholson) is a New York music mogul with a young libido, while Diane Keaton is a writer with more on her mind than sex. With Amanda Peet, Frances McDormand and Keanu Reeves. 2003 Academy Award nomination for Keaton. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Spartan: Written and directed by David Mamet, thriller stars Val Kilmer as an unquestioning, secret ops investigator partnered with a new guy (Derek Luke). They're searching for the president's kidnapped daughter (Kristen Bell) and must evade corrupt functionaries (Ed O'Neill, William H. Macy). R. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

Starsky and Hutch: Ben Stiller is uptight Starsky, while Owen Wilson is laid back Ken "Hutch" Hutchinson in

this remake of TV's undercover crime-fighters. With Vince Vaughn, Snoop Dogg, Juliette Lewis. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Tai Chi Master, The (1993): Michelle Yeoh and Jet Lee band together to defeat the bad guys in this film plumped up with many startling fights, choreographed by film's director Woo-ping Yuen, who did the *Matrix* films. LateNite Bijou.

Touching the Void: In 1985, two daring British climbers scaled the unclimbed west face of 20, 853 foot Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes. Coming down, a succession of events made their survival unlikely. Director Kevin Macdonald's brilliant and touching mixed documentary and re-enactment adventure film gets highest recommendations. NR. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Triplets of Belleville: Sylvain Chomet's animated tale features whimsical, skewed architecture looming over bizarre figures in this strange, wonderful work. A don't-miss gem from 2003, the film's Academy Award noms include Best Animated Film and original song. Very highest recommendations PG-13. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Bijou Art Cinemas (686-2458) Cinema World 8 (342-6536) Cinemark 17 (746-5202)c Movies 12 (741-1231)

video clips

NEW RELEASES ON VIDEO

Releases subject to change. Available the Tuesday following date of EW publication, sometimes sooner. See archived movie reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

Beyond Borders: Angelina Jolie and Clive Owen star in this romantic adventure set in Third World hot spots. He's a doctor working behind the lines in war-torn countries; she's a socialite who loves him. Flawed, but recommended for its unflinching look at the plight of refugees around the world, and the work of doctors to save them. Directed by Martin Campbell. R. **Online archives.**

Damned, The (1969): Luchino Visconti's celebrated film about an Italian family's divisive move to align themselves with the Nazis during the '30s. Stars Charlotte Rampling, Helmut Berger. Released in February.

Dirty Pretty Things: Stephen Frears directs Audrey Tautou and Chiwetel Ejiofor as immigrants in London who work at the same West London hotel, a secret underworld of illegal activity. Thriller. Excellent performances and a weird beauty. Highly recommended. 2003 Academy Award nom: Original screenplay, Steven Knight. R. **Online archives.**

Magdalene Sisters, The: Four young Irish women are sent to the Magdalene Laundries and Asylums for "moral crimes" such as a pregnancy outside of marriage, reporting a rape or being too pretty. Actual institution operated the whole of the 20th century, in the open, with the full authority and blessing of the church. Amazing performances; courageous direction by Peter Mullan. NR. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Shattered Glass: Hayden Christensen plays *The New Republic* staff writer Stephen Glass who wrote heavily fictionalized stories and then lied about it. Peter Sarsgaard plays his editor, Chloe Sevigny a duped co-worker. Highest recommendations. PG-13. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Singing Detective, The: Chicago novelist (Robert Downey Jr.)bedridden and feverish, reworks his first novel, *The Singing Detective*, in his mind. He becomes the detective in pursuit of Nazis in the 1940s, but the battle he's fighting is with his own demons. Keith Gordon directs. Strange but well worth a look for Downey's performance. Also stars Robin Wright Penn, Mel Gibson, Katie Holmes, Adrien Brody, Jeremy Northam, Carla Gugino, Jon Polito. R.

Something's Gotta Give: Directed by Nancy Meyers. Harry Sanborn (Jack Nicholson) is a New York music mogul with a libido much younger than his years, while Diane Keaton is a writer with more on her mind than sex. With Amanda Peet, Frances McDormand and Keanu Reeves. 2003 Academy Award nomination for Keaton. PG-13. **Online archives.**

Next week: Brother Bear; House of Sand and Fog; Music collections of Louis Jordan, Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughn; Ripley's Game (2002); Texas Chainsaw Massacre.