



Pretty on the Outside

Luc Besson's latest is too sweet for its own good

ANGEL-A: Written and directed by Luc Besson. Cinematography, Thierry Arbogast. Music, Anja Garbarek. Production design, Jacques Bufnoir. Starring Jamel Debbouze and Rie Rasmussen. Sony Pictures Classics, 2006. 91 minutes. R. ★★☆☆☆

Arguably, French writer-director-producer Luc Besson made his biggest splash in American theaters with 1997's *The Fifth Element*, a sci-fi trip full of derivative moments and blinding sets — and creative, playful spirit and striking images. Before *Element*, Besson was best known for *The Professional*, which cast a very young, clearly talented Natalie Portman as a girl in the care and training of a hitman, and *La Femme Nikita*, about a convicted felon reinvented as a super-spy.

Between *Element* and *Angel-A* (which was released in 2005 in France), Besson directed one film, the flimsy *The Messenger*. (He spent his time producing handfuls of films, from Tommy Lee Jones' *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* to the the underappreciated *District B13*, which he also co-wrote.) You can trace a line connecting these three films with no effort whatsoever: They all involve preternaturally gifted — and astonishingly leggy — women as powerful saviors. *Element's* unforgettable, orange-haired Leeloo (Milla Jovovich) was an alien being helping Bruce Willis' cabdriver save the universe from evil; *The Messenger's* main character, Joan of Arc (Jovovich again), doesn't need any

introduction; *Angel-A's* Angela (Rie Rasmussen) abilities are right there in the film's title. Makeup smeared, platinum hair mussed, she appears on the Paris bridge from which André (Jamel Debbouze, of *Amelie*) is preparing to leap. André is in massive debt, broke, lacking identification and full of self-deception. His introduction to the viewer is nearly all lies, at the end of which he admits he lies to himself incessantly. But Debbouze's childlike, open face makes us want to think André is capable of more than simply trying to weasel his way out of paying up. André, though, is running out of options.

Enter Angela, who throws herself into the river and, when André saves her, attach-

es herself to him. Enthusiastic, cheery, innocent and sensual, Angela seems to embody too many things at once; it's almost impossible to keep an eye on her ever-moving limbs. She towers over André, who seems constantly to squint as if he's looking straight into the sun when he looks up at her. The two of them traipse through a stunning Paris of empty streets (the black-and-white film was shot in July and August, when many Parisians were on vacation) and endless bridges. Angela has decided to help André get himself together again — it's repayment for his pulling her from the river. But her techniques are incomprehensible, and André begins to ask questions, confused about Angela's motives, talents and actions.

Angela's provenance is no surprise, and neither is her eventual breakdown or the film's fairy-tale feel, especially as it draws to a close. This is a wee urban fable of a different kind, one involving not the fey but the sublime — albeit a sublime with a sense of humor. But this sense is inconsistent, and one of *Angel-A's* main failures is that it simply takes itself too seriously. It's wish fulfillment of a high order: A scruffy, scheming, duplicitous man is saved from himself by the love of a good (gorgeous, heaven-sent) woman. Without an awareness of the sentimentality inherent in this story and a strong sense of humor to temper that sentimentality, *Angel-A* becomes treacly and uncomfortably sweet. Though it's stacked with dazzling imagery and beautiful shots, perfect costumes and a dancing interplay of light on dark, there's simply nothing satisfying in this cotton-candy tale but its gorgeously filmed surfaces. **EW**

Angel-A opens Friday, Aug. 3, at the Bijou.

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Angel-A: Once again, writer-director Luc Besson entices and frustrates, much like he did with *The Fifth Element*. This new film concerns a fellow with far too much debt and the stunning woman who appears from nowhere to help him out of it — and help him find himself. Beautiful cinematography can't mask the shallowness of this wish-fulfillment tale. R. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Bourne Ultimatum, The: "I remember everything," says Matt Damon's Jason Bourne in this film's action-packed trailer. Director Paul Greengrass and the major players (Joan Allen, Julia Stiles) return to the series' third installment, in which Bourne is hunting down his past. Seems as if he might find it. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Bratz: The bubble-headed dolls come to life in the story of four girls who find that high school cliques are downright hard to avoid. What lessons will they learn from trying to fight the bossy student body president? Will the Bratz be divided? Tough questions, for sure. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Evan Almighty: Steve Carrell takes the starring role in this sequel to *Bruce Almighty*. Now, God (Morgan Freeman) wants Evan (Carrell), a former newscaster turned Congressman, to build an ark. Boy, that's gonna involve a lot of critters. PG. Movies 12.

Hot Rod: Andy Samberg ("Lazy Sunday") leaps from your YouTube window to the big screen, playing Rod, an amateur stuntman whose stepdad is a big jerk. Er ... what? Oh, OK; Rod has to save the day eventually. Samberg's a charmer, but this movie doesn't look like one. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Ideas Made Visible: Three anti-civilization films featuring John Zerzan, followed by discussion of media representation of radical ideas. 7 pm Aug. 8, DIVA. Free.

Led Zeppelin: The In-Concert film series presents the fourth of Led Zep's five nights at London's Eart's Court on the *Physical Graffiti* tour in 1975. The four-hour concert is shown in two parts: part one Friday and Sunday, part two Saturday. Bijou LateNite.

Mighty Heart, A: Angelina Jolie stars as Marianne Pearl, whose husband Daniel was murdered while investigating a story on Richard Reid. Michael Winterbottom's (*Tristram Shandy*) film is in large part a procedural, but Jolie's performance holds together and raises the movie. R. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (6/28)

Mr. Sean's Cartoon Club: Crazy, weird and old cartoons featuring Betty Boop, Felix, Superman and

more. Noon-1:30 pm Aug. 5. Bijou. \$4.

My Neighbor Totoro: Hayao Miyazaki's (*Spirited Away*) winning, unforgettable tale about the forest creatures two girls meet when they move to the country with their father. It's not as sophisticated as Miyazaki's later films, but there's a magical charm in the rotund totoro. Not to be missed. Show with subtitles for the hearing impaired at 9 pm Friday, Aug. 3, Washington Park. Pre-show entertainment begins at 8 pm.

Nancy Drew: The classic teen heroine arrives on the big screen in the form of Emma Roberts, whose perkiness isn't enough to put the charm in this awkward film, which updates Nancy's setting and the subject of her investigation, but not her style or demeanor. PG. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (6/21)

Surf's Up: The young, talented, possibly misguided Shia LaBeouf voices Cody Maverick, a teenage penguin surfer entering his first pro competition. A documentary crew's filming his every move, which might — sort of — explain that "based on a true story" joke in the preview. PG. Movies 12.

Underdog: Jason Lee voices the titular canine, who finds himself superpowered after an incident in the lab of mad scientist Simon Barsinister (Peter Dinklage). Bad guys have plots, but Underdog has a spaniel to impress! Oh, and the day to save. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

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

CONTINUING:

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer: Reed Richards, Ben Grimm and Sue and Johnny Storm face off with the shiny guy who rides an equally shiny surfboard — and leaves destruction in his wake. PG13. Movies 12.

Hairspray: Based on John Waters' 1988 cult classic, *Hairspray* is about teenagers on a local Baltimore dance show — especially one short, plump, cheery girl who loves to dance. With John Travolta in drag. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (7/26)

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: The Ministry of Magic is in denial about the return of Lord Voldemort, Hogwarts get a nasty new teacher and Harry ... Harry's in one kind of trouble or another throughout the mostly successful and only slightly disappointing fifth HP film. It's not quite *Prisoner of*

Azkaban, but it's getting there. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (7/19)

I Know Who Killed Me: Oh, Lindsay, Lindsay, Lindsay. Tear yourself away from La Lohan's tabloid escapades with this thriller about a young woman who, after escaping from a serial killer, insists that things aren't what they appear. R. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry: Adam Sandler and Kevin James star as a couple of firefighters who, for various bureaucratic insurance reasons, claim to be domestic partners — all fun and games until the news gets ahold of the story. I'm sure all related issues are dealt with thoughtfully. Um, right. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Knocked Up: Judd Apatow follows *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* with a sweet yet still raunchy comedy about the unwanted pregnancy that occurs when up-and-coming journalist Alison (Katherine Heigl of *Grey's Anatomy*) has a one-night stand with slacker Ben (Seth Rogen). R. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (6/7)

La Vie en Rose: This majestic, flawless film explores the life of Edith Piaf, as played to perfection by Marion Cotillard. Olivier Dahan's film depicts the singer's too-short life, packed with troubles and talent in seemingly equal measure, with sparing elements of the supernatural. PG13. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (7/19)

Live Free or Die Hard: Justin Long — yes, he of the Mac ads — joins Bruce Willis for this fourth chapter in the Die Hard franchise, in which a baddie attacks the U.S.'s infrastructure over the 4th of July weekend. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Meet the Robinsons: Orphaned inventor Lewis has his latest and greatest creation stolen, but a stranger whisks him away to the future, where adventures, and the thief, await. G. Movies 12.

Mr. Brooks: Kevin Costner stars as the title character, a loving husband by day who's also — gasp! — a serial killer by night! William Hurt is his evil alter-ego; Dane Cook's the photographer who sees the killer in action; Demi Moore's the hot detective on his trail. R. Movies 12.

No Reservations: Not all chefs are as hot as the oddly appealing Anthony Bourdain (whose travel show shares a title with this film) or, say, Catherine Zeta-Jones, who here plays a perfectionist chef at a fancy Manhattan restaurant whose world is shaken up by the arrival of her niece (Abigail Breslin) and a new sous chef (Aaron Eckhart) with a style in direct opposition to her own. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Once: John Carney's movie takes "lyrical" to a differ-

ent level with the gentle, engrossing story of two musicians who find an unexpected connection on the streets of Dublin. Threaded with lovely songs composed by the movie's leads, Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova, *Once* is an exceptional accomplishment of intimate filmmaking. R. Bijou. ★★★★★ (7/26)

Paprika: A thrilling, imaginative, even lovely trip through a dreamscape brought to life by the DC Mini, a device that renders a sleeper's dreams share-able — and eventually, in the wrong hands, brings them into the real world. This unforgettably creative animated film is among the best of the year so far; its images are indelible. R. Bijou LateNite. ★★☆☆☆ (7/5)

Ratatouille: The latest animated film from Pixar is directed by Brad Bird (whose *The Iron Giant* is too often overlooked) and concerns a big-dreaming rat who wants to be a chef. When he makes a deal with a garbage boy, the culinary world of Paris gets far more than it ever imagined. G. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (7/12)

Rescue Dawn: Werner Herzog's new film is an adaptation of his own documentary *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997). The always-able Christian Bale stars as Dieter Dengler, who was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam conflict. Though visually impressive, the film lacks emotional depths. PG13. VRC Stadium 15. **See review this issue.**

Shrek the Third: When Shrek's father-in-law kicks the bucket, the ogre finds himself the reluctant king of Far Far Away. His only hope of getting out of the job? His wife's slacker cousin. PG. Movies 12.

Simpsons Movie, The: Well, our Springfield didn't get the premiere, but in the film maybe we'll still see some hints that we are the *real* Simpsons Springfield? Still no idea what it's about, but does it matter? PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Spider-Man 3: Spidey (Tobey Maguire) faces an ungodly number of new villains (including those played by Thomas Haden Church and Topher Grace) as the franchise trucks through its overfull third installment. PG13. Movies 12. ★☆☆☆☆ (5/10)

Transformers: It wouldn't be summer without a Michael Bay film, right? Hot on the heels of those other '80s toys the Ninja Turtles, the Transformers arrive, bigger and flashier than ever. Earth, it seems, will be the battleground for the war between the Autobots and the Decepticons. With Shia LaBeouf (*Holes*) and Megan Fox. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.