



Singing 'Bout Luv

Messy but beautiful

ROMANCE AND CIGARETTES: Written and directed by John Turturro. Executive producers, Joel and Ethan Coen. Starring Susan Sarandon, James Gandolfini, Kate Winslet, Steve Buscemi, Mary-Louise Parker, Christopher Walken, Mandy Moore and Aida Turturro. United Artists, 2007. R. 105 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

John Turturro’s crazy quilt of a film has been lingering in distribution limbo for years, so don’t be put off by the fact that you might not have heard much about this one recently. It’s not perfect, and it’s not for everyone, sure, but those with a taste for the slightly absurd will find plenty to be charmed by in this story of a working-class Queens family that appears to be imploding under the strain of Kitty’s (Susan Sarandon) discovery of Nick’s (James Gandolfini) infidelity. (His mistress, Tula, is played by a voluptuous, redheaded, foul-mouthed and wonderful Kate Winslet.) But really, it seems like the Murder family must always have been in a state of implosion, what with three slightly kooky daughters — peculiar and kind Rosebud (Aida Turturro); Constance (Mary-Louise Parker), who is anything but constant; and Baby (Mandy

Moore), who’s just too sweet — and a neighborhood full of oddballs, including Christopher Walken as the peculiar Cousin Bo (his car’s name? Candida). To get their tumultuous feelings out, these folks all frequently burst into song.

But *Romance and Cigarettes* isn’t a regular old musical; it’s more like fantastical karaoke with the stars’ voices layered over recognizable tunes. Sarandon belts out “Piece of My Heart” with a church choir led by Eddie Izzard (if that alone doesn’t make you laugh, this might not be a film for you) and the daughters rock “I Want Candy.” Characters’ imaginations and fantasies come to life during musical numbers, but not always — though when they do, it’s to good

effect. Turturro’s talented cast is capable of handling the songs and his quirky dialogue (choice terms include “fuck bloomers” and “whoremaster”) while gently communicating the complexities of family (and other) relationships with crooked eyebrows or half-smiles. While Kitty and Nick spend a good part of the film hurt and avoiding each other, their grounded, core relationship is steadily there, apparent in the turbulent connections between parents and children. Vivid, bawdy, surreal, *Romance and Cigarettes* is a little bit of a mess, but it’s an audacious, entertaining and — of all things — touching mash-up of genres and styles. What a giddy break from the norm.

Romance and Cigarettes opens Friday, Dec. 21, at the Bijou.

Geek Love

EAGLE VS. SHARK: Written and directed by Taika Waititi. Music, The Phoenix Foundation. Starring Loren Horsley, Jermaine Clement, Craig Hall, Rachel House, Brian Sergeant and Joel Tobeck. Miramax, 2007. R. 87 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

There’s something of the geek hit *Napoleon Dynamite* in Taika Waititi’s *Eagle Vs. Shark*, a goofy tale of misfit love, awkward, frozen-in-adolescence boys and surviving in the “normal” world. But Waititi’s film doesn’t too energetically mimic the tone that put me off *Napoleon*: that sense that the director was laughing *at*, not with, his subjects. Still, there’s a certain amount of skepticism directed at obsessive video game store clerk Jarrod (Jermaine Clement) and sweet, slightly vacant Lily (Loren Horsley), a jobless fast-food server who’s in love with Jarrod simply because the mole on his lip is the mirror image of her own.

Many of *EVS*’ cleverest moments come early, particularly at the “dress as your favorite animal” party from which the title comes. (Jarrod was going to dress as a shark, but then he realized an eagle was “slightly better.”) Later, Jarrod’s “hacker” friend (whose computer is infected with a porn virus), his sister and brother-in-law and their entrepreneural schemes and his depressed father provide laughs when Jarrod and Lily travel to Jarrod’s hometown so he can finalize his plans for revenge against a high school bully. There are sweet moments in this film, but most of them come from Lily’s interactions with Jarrod’s family; Jarrod himself is insufferable, a manchild whose thoughtless cruelty and self-importance made me wish Lily would come to her senses and DTMFA (as Dan Savage would put it; more politely, I wished she’d split). But Waititi is endlessly forgiving of his buffoon of a character, a trait which becomes more endearing every time the director lets a little magic creep into the film via charming animated sequences. This debut feature wobbles, but Waititi might be one to watch out for. *Eagle Vs. Shark* opens Friday as a LateNite feature at the Bijou. — *Molly Templeton*



movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Across the Universe: Julie Taymor (*Titus*, Broadway’s *The Lion King*) puts her ambitious but unsatisfying spin on a love story built around Beatles songs, following a young man (Jim Sturgess) and the girl he falls for (Evan Rachel Wood) amid the tumult of the 1960s. PG13. 131 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (10/18)

Alien vs. Predator: Requiem: Honest to goodness, I didn’t even know they were making another AVP until I saw an ad last week. Directors Colin and Greg Strause did visual effects work on *300*, which ought to be enough to get a certain audience into theaters to watch the nasty monsters fight. R. 86 min. Cinemark, opens 12/25.

Charlie Wilson’s War: Mike Nichols directs from an Aaron Sorkin script this political ... drama? comedy? ... about a congressman (Tom Hanks) who combined forces with a CIA agent (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and a rich socialite (Julia Roberts) to direct a massive covert operation during the Cold War era. R. 97 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young: A 1974 performance at London’s Wembley Stadium depicts the band in front of a huge audience. Part of the In-Concert series. Bijou LateNite.

Eagle vs. Shark: “*Napoleon Dynamite* in New Zealand” is both too glib a description and not that far off for this overly quirky film about two peculiar characters who sort of fall in love — when one’s not “training” to defeat his high school nemesis in single combat. Still, it’s not without its charms. R. 87 min. Bijou LateNite.

Great Debaters, The: Denzel Washington (who also directs) stars in the (based-on-a-true) story of a debate coach in the segregated South who leads his Texas college team to a face-off with Harvard. PG13. 123 min. Cinemark, opens 12/25.

Mr. Sean’s Cartoon Club: Crazy, weird and old Christmas cartoons. Prizes and surprises. 12:45 pm Dec. 22. Bijou. \$4.

National Treasure: Book of Secrets: Nicolas Cage returns for more adventure and hijinks — something to do with the president’s secret book (hey, this sounds like *Crooked Little Vein!*) and clearing his family’s name; did great-great grandpa have something to do with Lincoln’s assassination? With Helen Mirren. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

P.S. I Love You: Holly (Hilary Swank) must go on without the love of her life, Gerry (Gerard Butler) when illness strikes. But for her 30th birthday, she gets a letter and a tape from Gerry, telling her how to make the most of her life. Sorry, have to end this there; I feel a bit queasy from all the sweetness. PG13. 126 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Romance and Cigarettes: John Turturro’s film finally breaks free from distribution limbo. The peculiar comedy-drama-musical mix gets messy at times, but a great cast (Susan Sarandon, Kate Winslet, James Gandolfini, Mary-Louise Parker), hysterical musical sequences and snappy dialogue make this bawdy working-class romance/heart-break film a winner. R. 105 min. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Sweeney Todd: Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter (and Alan Rickman!) star in Tim Burton’s take on the Broadway musical about a murderous barber who’s sworn revenge for what happened to his wife and daughter. “Depp is simply stupendous,” says *Rolling Stone*. R. 117 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Tango and Cash: Have some good post-Christmas fun mocking Sylvester Stallone and Kurt Russell in this late ’80s flick at Heckler’s Movie Night, 7 pm Dec. 26, Wandering Goat Coffee Shop. Free.

Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story: While I’m all for both John C. Reilly and the sending up of *Walk the Line*, this satirical rock ’n’ roll faux-biopic appears, from the trailers, to be trying too hard. But it’s directed by Jake Kasdan, whose *The Zero Effect* was shamefully overlooked. Hrm. R. 96 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Water Horse: Legend of the Deep: It’s nice to see Ben Chaplin (*The Truth About Cats and Dogs*) again, even if it’s in this too-cute-but-still-charming children’s film about a boy who finds a mysterious eggs that turns into a mythical creature. Directed by Jay Russell (*My Dog Skip*). PG. Cinemark, opens 12/25.

We Own the Night: Family and loyalty clash in James Gray’s film, in which nightclub manager Bobby (Joaquin Phoenix) hides his relationship to a NYC cop family while also keeping a distance from the gangster who operates out of his club. With Mark Wahlberg, Eva Mendes and Robert Duvall. R. 105 min. Movies 12.

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

CONTINUING:

Alvin and the Chipmunks: What’s next? A live-action Care Bears movie starring Jason Lee? (He’s in this and *Underdog*, for those not keeping track.) Those wacky little creatures with the high-pitched voices will surely cause him some trouble in this newest bit of family fare. With, um, David Cross. Now I’m confused. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

American Gangster: Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe face off in the story of 1970s driver turned drug lord Frank Lucas (Washington) and the cop investigating Lucas and his unexpected rise to power. Directed by Ridley Scott. R. 157 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (11/8)

August Rush: Keri Russell and Jonathan Rhys Meyers star as a musical young couple whose lovelorn encounter produces a child. Orphaned “by circumstance” (says the description), the boy (Freddie Highmore) grows up to become a musical prodigy. PG. 113 min. Cinemark (ends 12/24). VRC Stadium 15.

Bee Movie: Not much looks all that sweet about this animated comedy, in which Jerry Seinfeld voices a recent bee college graduate who learns, to his shock, that humans have been stealing bees’ honey for ages and ages. With the voices of Renee Zellweger and Matthew Broderick. PG. 90 min. Movies 12.

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’ satisfying third installment, which finds Bourne hunting down his past in stunning locations. PG13. 111 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Dragon Wars: The good: Dragons! In L.A.! The bad: The plot is a convoluted thing about magical powers, resurrected lovers and a dragon that will be able to ascend into heaven. Also, the biggest names in the cast are Jason Behr (*Roswell*) and Robert Forster. But still ... dragons! In L.A.! Can it be better than *Reign of Fire*? PG13. 90 min. Movies 12.

Enchanted: Beautiful princesses! Handsome princes! And ... midtown Manhattan? Amy Adams (*Junebug*), James Marsters (*X-Men*) and Patrick Dempsey (*Grey’s Anatomy*) star in this fairy tale in the real world, which follows Princess Giselle (Adams) after a wicked witch banishes her from her magical kingdom. Why does this Disney flick look so charming? PG. 107 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Golden Compass, The: An only slightly above average film — mostly on account of the fantastic casting — based on Philip Pullman’s utterly brilliant novel. In a world much like our own, everyone has an animal companion who’s part of themselves, and one little girl (newcomer Dakota Blue Richards) is the key to saving not just her own world, but countless others as well. With Daniel Craig, Nicole Kidman, Sam Elliott and Eva Green. PG13. 113 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (12/13)

Hitman: Timothy Olyphant, go back to *Deadwood*! No, kidding, kidding. But honestly, I’m not sure this videogame-

based film about a professional assassin trying to find out who set him up (wait, does this remind anyone of Jason Bourne?) is the best place for you. R. 100 min. Movies 12. VRC Stadium 15.

I Am Legend: Will Smith does the all-by-his-lonesome thing in a New York City left not exactly empty after a manmade virus devastates the globe. During the day, he tries to find other survivors; at night, he tries to survive the creatures that are what’s left of humanity. PG13. 100 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. **See review this issue.**

I’m Not There: Portland filmmaker Todd Haynes’ (*Far From Heaven*) unconventional Bob Dylan movie is one of the year’s most anticipated — and, for the most part, highly praised. Different actors, including Cate Blanchett, Heath Ledger and Christian Bale, play incarnations of Dylan over the decades. “One of the most inventive and joyous movies of the year,” said *Salon*. R. 135 min. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (12/6)

Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium: This story about a magical toy store, its owner (Dustin Hoffman) and the young shop employee who might inherit it (Natalie Portman) is written and directed by Zach Helm, who also wrote last year’s *Stranger Than Fiction*. G. 94 min. Movies 12.

No Country for Old Men: The latest from the Coen brothers is a near-masterpiece, an adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s acclaimed novel, and it’s earning plenty of acclaim itself. The story involves a small-town sheriff, a deadly drug deal and a psychopathic killer (Javier Bardem). The reviewers say “intense,” “searing,” “an evil delight.” R. 122 min. Cinemark (ends 12/24). VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/29)

Resident Evil: Extinction: Alice (Milla Jovovich) is *still* trying to get rid of that pesky zombie-making virus. For this third film in the series, Alice gets new friends (we suspect they replace those zombified last time out) including *Heroes*’ Ali Larter and singer Ashanti. R. 95 min. Movies 12.

3:10 to Yuma: Russell Crowe and Christian Bale costar in this solid Western from director James Mangold (*Walk the Line*). Based on a short story by Elmore Leonard that was made into a film in 1957, the film follows a vicious outlaw (Crowe) and the Civil War vet (Bale) who’s volunteered to get the thief to the train that’ll take him to trial. R. 117 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (9/13)

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. 84 min. Movies 12.