

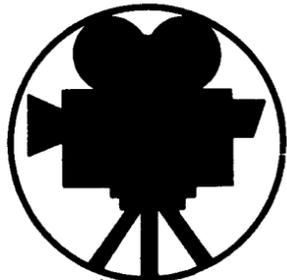
The Reel World

Rock Talk



By Gene McGovern

By Rick Morrison



MOMMIE DEAREST

Christina Crawford's book, "Mommie Dearest," in which she describes her difficult life as movie star Joan Crawford's adopted daughter, has been brought to the screen. Unfortunately, this sadistic, desensitizing film could be (and should be) put on afternoon television and made into one of America's "favorite" soap operas. At most, it could have been a made-for-television movie. It doesn't deserve any better.

Although Faye Dunaway's portrayal of Joan Crawford is very good and the make-up job done on her (particularly in the latter stages of the film) is extremely realistic, the film suffers from a script that makes this woman's anguish brutal and intolerable, rather than humane and understandable. By the time this film is half over one is so desensitized to the suffering that it is hard to care for the daughter or for Joan Crawford.

A good film with this much conflict would have done enough to at least make us care about the characters so that we could sympathize with them. An even better film would have made us care enough for the characters to empathize with them.

Furthermore, the script does nothing to contrast Joan Crawford's professional life with her role as a mother. Oh, we see the ever-present studio photographers snapping pictures of Joan and Christina in obligatory poses at Christina's birthday party, and we see Joan autographing 8 X 10 glossies and stuffing them into envelopes to be mailed to her adoring fans, but there is never any real substantive scene of her at work.

The only scene where something important happens to her on a professional level is when she is fired from MGM Studios by Louis B. Mayer. Even in that scene, there is little (visually or otherwise) to tell us what this meant to her career and subsequently how it caused her to suffer. At later times in the picture we see Joan Crawford as an aging actress who can't even get a contract to perform a role as a substitute for her daughter on a soap opera. That the script failed to contrast these difficulties with the success that this woman had as an actress (an Oscar-winning actress no less) is utterly shameful.

Additionally, the script is corny in several places. In particular, there is a scene in the film where Christina is awakened in the middle of the night by her mother. She is chastised for not keeping her bathroom clean, and Joan rages on. After a much too lengthy display of throwing cleansing powder all over the place, Joan instructs the little girl to clean up the mess. When Christopher, her brother who is also adopted and is approximately five years old (and who sleeps strapped into bed), offers to help his sister clean up the mess, Christina tells him, "Go strap yourself back in!" Not only does this line sound bad, but it plays even worse on the screen.

Finally, concerning the script, it is simply too long and repetitive. The movie borders on two and one-half hours. There are countless repetitive scenes of child abuse which continue to the time Christina is shown as a teenager home on a visit from the private school she attends.

The cinematography helps to give this film a more clean, wholesome look than it might have had if a lot of angle shots and intense close-ups had been used. But even looking straight on most of the time tended to get very boring.

Should I see this movie, you are asking yourself. My answer to that question is only if the soap opera you watch doesn't satisfy your appetite for gorgeous art deco set decoration.

STRIPES

"Stripes," starring Bill Murray, is a male version of "Private Benjamin." Nothing more, nothing less. Don't be surprised to see a television version of "Stripes" this winter or next fall; "Benjamin" was made into a sit-com, so "Stripes" could be, too. Perhaps that is all "Stripes" should be.

"Stripes" is nothing more than a tamed-down "Animal House" in army green. So why did so many people go to see the film this summer? My guess is that they wanted more of what they got in "Benjamin," but with a little more punch to it. But I don't think "Stripes" delivered that punch. In fact, it didn't even live up to its publicity.

A poor movie can be defined in many ways, but surely one way to identify a failure (artistically speaking) is to realize you've seen all you need to see in the television commercials which promote the movie. I know I laughed more at the television ads for "Stripes" than I did at the theater.

There are a few funny moments in "Stripes." This is not a credit to a film which tries to blend slapstick, witty dialogue, and satire, but it is a credit to Bill Murray. He was able to carry the few good laughs. But not very far.

Murray's characterization was much too weak in this movie. When compared to the characterization he developed in the role of the derelict greenskeeper in "Caddyshack," one is hard pressed to remember any characterization in "Stripes."

Unfortunately, the makers of this picture thought it would be funny to have us watch a band of misfit volunteers struggle through basic training only to haphazardly achieve high honors; to have us watch women mud wrestlers do their thing in beating up a fat soldier; and to have us watch an armored recreational-vehicle bust through barricades and destroy a Czechoslovakian army camp.

None of this was terribly funny, although it was meant to be. It was all done strictly for visual effect, but the situations were so ridiculously contrived that they were only mildly humorous.

Hopefully, in his next picture Murray will have more original material to work with. If he does, we could see him develop the hilarious characterization of the low-life types he did in "Caddyshack" and on television, e.g. remember Nick, the lounge singer he did on "Saturday Night Live"? Murray is capable of much better than "Stripes" allowed for.

You may be asking yourself, "Should I go see this movie?" My reply--No, don't bother. Wait until they make it into a weekly sit-com. Then, don't watch that either--it's likely to be even worse.

Has rock music gained the massive popularity it now enjoys solely on its pure musical value, or because of the personalities behind the music and the total entertainment package that it offers the public? Frank Sinatra doesn't shoot laser lights at his adoring fans, nor does he have explosions and a battery of lights flashing as he moves about the stage singing "My Way" or "New York, New York."

There is definitely some real musicianship and moving lyrics that emerge from time to time, but the large majority of rock music can best be described as a raucous, ostentatious, theatrical farce. Cases in point:

□ Judas Priest wear black leather and chains and ride on stage with motorcycles. Elvis Presley, if he were still alive, would probably applaud this behavior.

□ Angel is a group that is known for its materialization on stage; they seem to appear from nowhere. They are a prime example of the current state of the art in the bizarre world of rock.

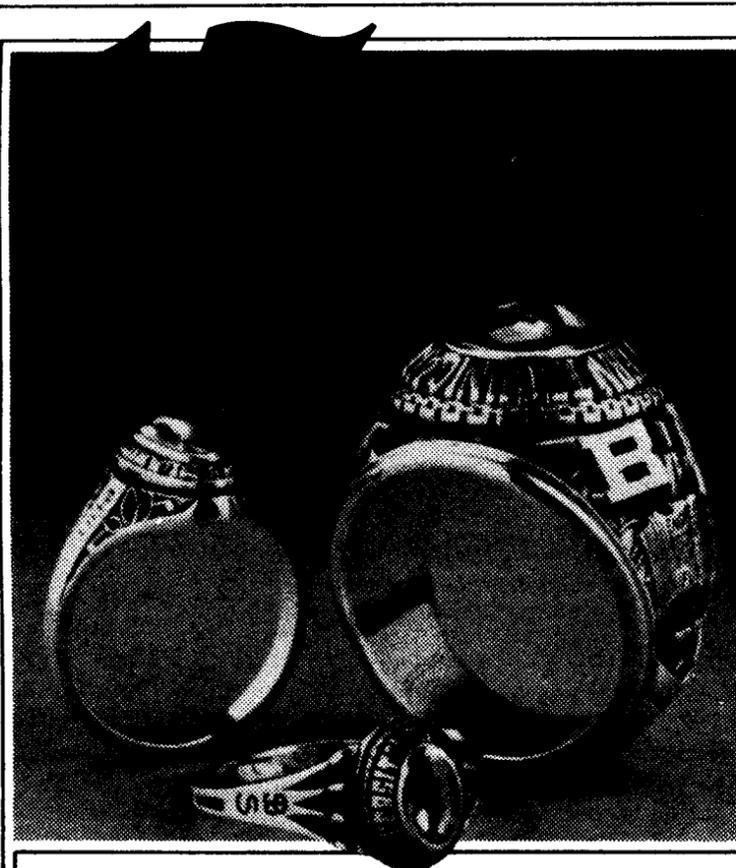
□ Oh, has anybody forgotten Alice Cooper or Kiss? Hardly! Alice sings to his boa constrictor and guillotines an unsuspecting female on stage. This smacks of a Tarzan-Executioner double feature. Kiss sings about partying and screwing (around). They are known for their simplistic chord structures, their gaudy costumes, explosions on stage, smoke (dry ice), and their human flame-thrower, Gene Simmons.

□ Blue Oyster Cult sing about Godzilla and other death/horror film oriented songs. They happen to use the services of motorcycles also. They ought to make a movie called "The Easy Riders vs. King Kong."

□ What about Wendy OWilliams and the Plasmatics? They blow up cars and smash TVs on stage. This is supposed to represent opposition to our materialistic, industrialized society. Well, if she happens to cancel a date, maybe she could send me a Sony on my birthday.

□ Ted Nugent must have been a philosophy major at Buffalo U: "Wang Dang, Sweet Poontang" and an excerpt from "Wango Tango, My Face is a Mazaratti." That boy has some real social commentary in his lyrics!

Must I go on? So, what is rock all about? I don't know, but It's Only Rock 'N Roll, but I like it.



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