movies...

Steiger is great; ‘Brain’, Fonda films fail

By Barry Mitnick

"Four, Mine, and Om." now playing at the Avenue, is a Lucille Ball - Henry Fonda - Van Johnson situation comedy that might have made it big for thirteen weeks in a 7:30 time slot on television. As a movie, it is eminently forgettable.

The film depicts the courtship and marriage of a widow and a widower who have, between them, eighteen children. More cannot be said about the plot; it is completely predictable. The jokes, as such, generally pack the punch of pulpam and the wit of warm milk. Occasionally amounting hoonous slips through, and it comes as a shock. Tom Bosley is wasted in a walk-on as pedicurean; two hours may be wasted watching this movie.

No Way to Treat a Lady

"No Way to Treat a Lady," at the Circle Theater, is a showcase for Rod Steiger. The Academy Award winner appears to enjoy himself immensely in a role requiring a half dozen or so disguises; and so does the moviegoer.

Steiger spends the better part of the film arranging middle-aged ladies and then telephoning the detective chasing him to inform him of the murders. George Segal as the harassed detective is superbly harassed, and Lee Remick as the witness he falls for delivers one-liners of the unnamed spy (Harry Palmer in the movie). One is the reckless whiney and ruthless civility of Harry Newman (Leo Newbiggen in the film), thenecessary sympahtist of a right-wing arm board on liberating Latvia. Replacing them as distracting touches of James Bond gagetry, found nowhere in the book, a phobbing and sometimes superificious directoral pacing, and a nervously exaggerated score that rises to deafening absurdity and stunning troop scenes.

Plot simplified

The novel’s plot, centered on the machinations and personality of Harry Newbiggen and the efforts of the unnamed spy to fathom them, is currently foreshortened and simplified, falling nearly to the banality of the kind of television spy pursuit hour popular recently. The book, a plausible and sometimes soporific directorial pacing, and a distractingly touch of James Bond gagetry, found nowhere in the novel’s plot, centered on the machinations and personality of Harry Newbiggen and the efforts of the unnamed spy to fathom them, is currently foreshortened and simplified, falling nearly to the banality of the kind of television spy pursuit hour popular recently.

The film’s best moments, indeed, come during the few scenes lifted bodily from the book, such as the confrontation between Foner and Colonel Rook, the Russian spy chief, in Palmer’s bar room. The outtakes of dialogue that elevates Deighton’s grade above the deluge of spy trituration appearing these days is jettisoned elsewhere in favor of the, “How do you know I can trust you?”- “You don’t”-“ you do?”-“you don’t”-“you do?” -“you don’t”-“you do?”

The acting represents the competent efforts of people with little to act out. Michael Caine repeats as Harry Palmer, Karl Malden is the Oxford-trained spy in the film, the late Francois Dorleac, Amya, a professor of literature, Oscar Romero in the film, and Sigourney Weaver of the demonic General Medeviata, commanded by the super-Republican army.

For the travel-minded, there is one nice scene of snow in Finland. That brilliany, scientists, too, are people.

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