Believe it: FM is a fantastic movie

FM, a Universal Studios release, stars Michael Brandon, Ellen Bryman, Alex Karras, Cleavon Little, Martin Mull, and Cassie Yates, produced by Rand Holland, directed by John A. Alonso, written by John Stacks, playing at the Sack, 18th and Pico.

By Drew Blakeman

To put it plainly, FM is an excellent movie and is the best I've seen since Annie Hall. It is entertaining above all else, a comedy, serious without being ing a comedy, serious without being a drama, and has liberal doses of flat-out .

famous throughout. FM is funny because of its excellent programming and the loyal audience it attracts. The powers that be (who also happen to own the station) send representatives to LA from the corporate offices in Chicago to find out why "the number one station in the number two market" isn't pulling in more profits than it is. This profiteering-versus-programming conflict eventually forces the QSKY personnel to go on strike and take over the station until they are permitted to keep their jobs for the rest over QSKY's highly popular format.

Although the main plot and all of the varied subplots are good enough to keep any audience interested, the characterizations are what make FM work. Michael Brandon downplays the character of station manager Jeff Dugan quite appropriately, making him the one voice among a bunch of zeroes. Ellen Bryman is Mother, a deejay who's been in the business for so long that she wants to quit, yet can't because she is so attached to her job.

The Prince of Darkness, a part that Cleavon Little seems to have fun hamming up, is QSKY's brash midnight-mornings man and a real dandy. Cassie Yates plays Laura, one of the best deejays in the industry and Dugan's ex-girlfriend, who takes over for Alex Karras' bumbling and insipid Doe Holiday when he is fired after his ratings drop. The Karras role should not have been written into the film, since it tends to detract from the rest of the movie and doesn't further the plot, even though he plays it well.

Martin Mull is the incredibly egotistical, outrageously arrogant and obnoxious ladies' man who you can't help but like. Mull is in the center of virtually all of the movie's most hilarious scenes.

The other minor characters also add considerable strength to FM. Of particular note is Jay Fenchel as young mind-managed Bobby Douglas, the station's technician who has always dreamed of becoming a deejay himself some day. James Keach is especially outstanding as the pot smoking Lt. Reach, who is trying to push some ridiculous sounding Army recruitment jingles (one with a disco beat, say) onto QSKY. Tom Tunney is good as the bookish financial consultant sent to straighten out the station's financial picture. He is about as out of place around rock music as any of the deejays would be behind the service accountant's desk.

There is some "live" concert footage of Jimmy Buffet and Linda Ronstadt in FM, but it is merely studio recordings from their albums poorly lip-synched onto staged concert films, something which might be seen on The Midnight Special rock shows on TV. It is painfully obvious on Ronstadt's Yumble Date, where her mouth and body motions don't match the music. There is even distortion and feedback added to boot, which adds to the phoniness of these scenes considering how recognizable the album versions are.

The final scenes, taking place on the street outside of the QSKY studios, was clearly filmed on a back lot at Universal Studios. The set simply does not look natural, although neither this nor the bogus concert footage detract from the movie itself, which was filmed with a relatively low budget. The QSKY studios are slightly more opulent than a "normal" radio station's would be. But then again, QSKY is not a "normal" radio station at all, it is a glamorous and highly romanticized version of one which plays only the best music all the time with only a bare minimum of commercials. It's too bad that stations like this don't really exist, but the fantasies of cinema never match the realities of life.

Even with its slight tinges of artificiality, FM comes through as a naturally good movie at a time when most releases are tainted garbage.

It is not a "classic" film in any sense of the word, but it is every bit as enjoyable and entertaining as any other, and that should be the first criterion of a movie's worth. And FM is definitely worth seeing.

The staff of radio station QSKY. (from left) Roberta Wallach, Cassie Yates, Jay Fenchel, Cleavon Little, and Ellen Bryman, announce that they are going on strike.

Station manager Jeff Dugan (Michael Brandon) is being pulled up to QSKY's laminted studios to join fellow employees (from left) Cleavon Little, Martin Mull, Cassie Yates, and Roberta Wallach in their strike.

The staff of radio stations QSKY. (from left) Roberta Wallach, Cassie Yates, Jay Fenchel, Cleavon Little, and Ellen Bryman, announce that they are going on strike.

Brenda Vanus is about to show some interesting things to Eric Swan (Martin Mull).