

Whose ice cream is the very best?

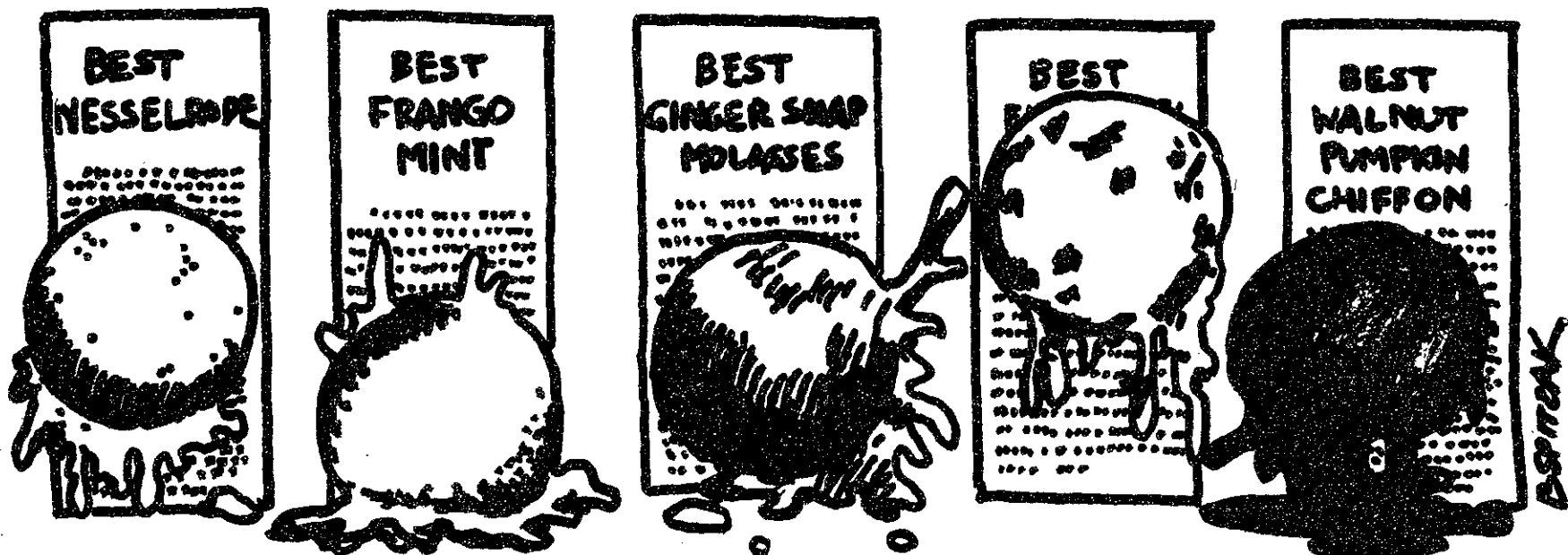
arts

The Very Best: Ice Cream and Where to Find It, by Carol T. Robbins and Herbert Wolff; *The Very Best*: Publishers, Inc., \$8.95.

I scooped my way through this summer, serving countless cones and sundaes to the hordes that daily swamped Toscanini's in Central Square. Through my conversations with the customers I learned of other havens for the ice cream connoisseur: Bob's Famous in Washington, DC, Gelato Classico in San Francisco, Creamed Again (formerly Mother Bucket's) in New York, and Vivoli in Florence, Italy. As I listened to these mouth watering encomiums I fantasized about the ultimate ice cream overload: a countrywide trek to investigate the country's best ice creameries.

My fantasy was quashed in mid-flight by a pair of enterprising Bostonians with the resources I lack. Carol Robbins and Herbert Wolff discovered, in the course of their cross-country business travels, a multitude of gourmet ice cream establishments, either by word of mouth, familiarity, or fortuitous accident. Eager to share their discoveries with a legion of addicts, they chose to publish their findings, but found themselves faced with a problem. Any attempt to select a single "best" store would instigate an all-out feud, as would any other form of store ranking. Their solution was to make everyone happy by listing stores by their best flavor. Every one of the 203 stores Robbins and Wolff investigated is mentioned by flavor in *The Very Best: Ice Cream and Where to Find It*.

The best store for each flavor, however, is not necessarily the best flavor from each



store; this distinction will undoubtedly produce the feuding Robbins and Wolff intended to avoid. Certainly Toscanini's makes an excellent Ginger Snap Molasses, and Steve's Cinnamon Nutmeg is beyond compare, but would the owners of these stores have chosen the listed flavors as their best? Moreover, the inclusion of chain-type stores such as Brigham's (Mocha Almond), Friendly's (Chocolate Almond Chip), Bailey's (Chocolate Chip), and Breyer's (Cherry Vanilla) will outrage owners and fanatics alike. The organization of *The Very Best* doesn't promise simple resolution of an argument. Rather than provide an alphabetical listing of stores according to geographical location, the book offers a rather confusing array of flavor groupings: Basics, Chips and Mixes, Berries, Orchard and Vine, Nuts, Tropi-

cals, Confections, and Spirits. Where, then, does the University of Wisconsin's Orange Custard Chocolate Chip fall? Is it a fruit flavor? No, asserts *The Very Best*, it is a chip or mix. It's enough to send you back to Good Humor bars.

The chain store issue deserves further investigation. Robbins and Wolff, by including listings from places most people assumed made only average ice cream, call attention to the fact that a gourmet-quality product can be found anywhere, while throughout the book they support the notion that smaller, single store operations make better ice cream by virtue of their smallness. Their promotion of ice cream *chic* elevates the consumption of frozen comestibles to the level of a fashionable trend. What could have been a AAA guide to cross-country ice creaming for the com-

mon man instead reads like a Michelin guide for the ice cream dilettante.

Although *The Very Best: Ice Cream and Where to Find It* is an interesting compilation of epicurean research, it fails in its attempt to settle the Great Ice Cream Feud. A friend's first reaction to the book was to exclaim "They left out Pat Mitchell's in Ithaca!" What it best succeeds at is what the authors intended to avoid: It is a reasonably comprehensive guide to the country's better ice cream parlors. Many will discover listings for stores that they never visited in their own hometowns, but part of the joy of eating ice cream lies in individual discovery. Now that a guide is available, it won't be as much fun anymore.

David Shaw

Eating Raoul not Bland fare

arts

Eating Raoul, directed by Paul Bartel, written by Richard Blackburn and Paul Bartel, playing at the Nickelodeon, Boston.

Paul and Mary Bland live in a nice apartment furnished à la 1950's modern. Paul (Paul Bartel) worked in a liquor store until he got fired for refusing to sell rotgut; Mary (Mary Woronov) spends her days coercing hospital patients to eat liver purée. They're decidedly middle class. Bland, even.

Paul and Mary have a dream. They want to escape the evil city, buy a house in the country, and open their own restaurant. With no money, no credit, and no more job in the liquor store, however, it seems "Chez Bland" will remain but a dream.

Paul and Mary are disgusted by the open sexuality of the hot tub age. Mary must continually fight off the sexual advances of her patients. Even their own apartment building is overrun by swingers in pursuit of communal kink.

One evening, an inebriated swinger tries to rape our fair heroine in her own kitchen. Paul comes to Mary's rescue, killing her assailant with a cast iron skillet. The Blands find hundreds of dollars in the deceased's wallet, and suddenly venture capital takes on a whole new meaning.

The Blands place an advertisement in a sleazy Hollywood magazine to lure wealthy "horrible, sex-crazed perverts" to their apartment, where, instead of fulfilling their wildest fantasies, Paul flattens their

skulls with his favorite frypan.

Raoul (Robert Beltran), a wolf in locksmith's clothing, catches on to their plan and gets himself into the family business — and into Mary.

Eating Raoul is a wonderfully funny film. Bartel shuns the prevailing style of comic films; *Eating Raoul* looks more for the smile and the chuckle than the constant stream of uncontrollable laughter many filmmakers seem to demand of their audiences. Everyone in this film is a straight man, tripping over the humor rather than dashing through it.

The dichotomy of the unbelievable situation and the understated comic tone is extremely effective. *Eating Raoul* lulls the audience into accepting a situation that grows progressively more ridiculous without noticing, leaving it vulnerable for a shocking comic crescendo.

This film's means undoubtedly contributed to its magic. Bartel, unable to sell the script because "it didn't fit a formula," decided to invest in two weekends of shooting to produce a twenty-minute clip. Not only did the clip not sell, Bartel said, but the apartment building in which much of it was filmed was sold and scheduled for demolition.

Faced with either reshooting the whole business or finishing the scenes in the Bland's building before the building went away, Bartel decided to press ahead. With as little cash as had the Blands, Bartel made *Eating Raoul* himself, buying left-over film stock from studios and renting



equipment for Saturdays so he could shoot all weekend for the price of just one day's rental.

Mary Woronov plays Mary wonderfully, sexy despite her revulsion to sex. She wears a clinging, nearly transparent dress to induce banker Buck Henry to approve her loan application, but her Sears Roebuck catalog standard-issue white brassiere and panties show something slightly different than the dress designer intended.

One can never quite figure out, while watching *Eating Raoul*, if Paul Bartel can,

indeed, act. One must therefore conclude that he can.

Robert Beltran's Raoul is slick and shady, but remains somehow fiercely idealistic. He is simultaneously deplorable and lovable, impervious and vulnerable. Both Raoul and Beltran are impressive actors.

Eating Raoul is one of those rare films — like *Harold and Maude* — that dare to take a sensitive approach to the absurd and end up far from being bland.

Barry S. Surman

Laser, laser burning bright

arts

Crystal Odyssey and Laserium Starship, produced by Laser Images, Inc. at the Hayden Planetarium of the Boston Museum of Science.

Since 1973, Laser Images has presented various musical laser shows throughout the world. *Laserium I*, essentially a series of abstract images with amplified rock, has grown into *Crystal Odyssey: A Classical Fantasy*, which recently began showing at the Museum of Science.

Unlike former laser shows, *Crystal Odyssey* has a plot and is set to classical music. The music includes segments of Vivaldi's "Winter" from *The Seasons*, Ravel's *Bolero*, Bach's *The Awakening*, and Holst's "Venus" from *The Planets*. The striking laser effects, presented in part by laserist Darryl Davis, combine with the music to form a beautifully striking presentation.

Unfortunately, the storyline intrudes; within the one hour feature, the producers have added an imaginary journey to the

planet Chromos. The audience, accompanied by Phosphor, seeks the Rainbow Makers. These beings reside within a crystal mirror into which the audience falls only to find Achros, who intends on trapping the unwary voyager within the mirror forever. Fortunately, escape comes quickly, and the entire audience becomes part of the Rainbow Makers alliance, spreading color throughout the universe.

The overall effect of the show, rather than enveloping the viewer, tends to leave him feeling that he is watching a second-rate science fiction thriller. Further intrusion is added when the audience cheers the admittedly excellent laser effects. The audience is encouraged to do so at the beginning of the performance.

Laserium Starship brings a return to the original philosophy of the laserium, a mind-boggling event which leaves the viewer with the feeling that he is the only one in the room. Although the rock back-

ground brings an audience which is a bit more rowdy, the din calms within ten minutes. The music for this show includes The Alan Parsons Project, Synergy, Yes, and selections from *Star Wars* (both John Williams and Meco) and *Close Encounters*.

As with the first show, the laser effects are excellent, and are enhanced with both

the star projector and strobes. Davis began working as a laserist at the Hayden Planetarium in New York in 1974 with the *Laserock* show. Since that time, he has operated three other laser shows.

The laserium effects are realized by using a 1W krypton gas laser beam which is split by prisms into four beams of red, yellow, blue, and green. These beams are then manipulated by other prisms, mirror scanners, and oscillators. Clouds of laser light are also possible through the use of a color modulator. Through the use of scan, interference, and diffraction, an infinite number of patterns can be created on the dome with the four colors.

The museum is easy to get to (Green line to Science Park); showtimes are Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night. Given a choice, I would see *Laserium Starship* again, but I heartily recommend both shows.

Stuart Gitlow

