The Addams Family has one foot in the grave

THE ADDAMS FAMILY
Written by Caroline Thompson and Larry Wilson.
Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld.
Starring Raul Julia, Anjelica Huston, Christopher Lloyd and Christina Ricci. Now playing at the Loew’s Chelsea.

By DEBORAH A. LEVINSON

THE ADDAMS FAMILY had such potential. With a cast of stars such as Raul Julia, Anjelica Huston and Christopher Lloyd, and a plot based on a goofy television show, how could it fail?

Somewhat, it does. Certainly, The Addams Family is a good time, if not an entirely worthwhile way to spend $6.75. But for a film that cost over $40 million, I expected a little more than a ridiculous plot (even by the television show’s standards), poor continuity and nearly non-existent editing.

The acting is one of the best parts of the film. Julia and Huston, alias the suave Gomez Addams and his ghoulish wife, Morticia, play their characters with real style. John Astin and Carolyn Jones only had the small screen to work with — Julia and Huston, given free rein, embody Gomez and Morticia with eroticism, grace, humor, and, above all, the playful insubordinacy that gives the film more than a bit of humor, and, above all, the playful morbid style. John Astin and Carolyn Jones only had the small screen to work with — Julia and Huston, given free rein, embody Gomez and Morticia with eroticism, grace, humor, and, above all, the playful insubordinacy that gives the film more than a bit of charm.

Christopher Lloyd and Dan Hedaya do what they can with their respective one-note roles of Uncle Fester and Tully, but Christina Ricci is the find of this film. As Christina Ricci: The Addams Family has one foot in the grave.

By ELAINE MCCORMICK

By Jeff Thielman and POOR IN PERU

POOR IN PERU

IT might have been spared the humiliation of one foot in the grave. Wednesday, the Addams’ pallid, severe daughter, Ricci neatly steals the movie, her deadpan exterior hiding a heart of pure evil. Whether snapping at her pushy brother Pugsley (Jimmy Workman) into the family electric chair for a friendly game of “Is There a God?” to requesting Girl Scout cookies only if they are “made of real Girl Scout cookies,” Ricci is a babysitter’s worst nightmare.

The Addams Family scores high on attention to detail as well. At least three scenes, including the gleeful anti-Christmas spirit opener, originate in Charles Addams’ cartoons. The Addams mansion, especially its treasure vault, would make the designers of the spookiest carnival haunted house jealous. And the special effects — notably those that bring to life the disembodied hand, Thing (Christopher Hart), and the David Letterman-esque Thing Cam, where the audience races down the corridors at Thing’s-eye, er, finger view — are spectacular.

It’s the editing that buries The Addams Family. Admittedly, this is director Barry Sonnenfeld’s first film, but given Sonnenfeld’s experience as director of photography on three Coen brothers films (Miller’s Crossing, Blood Simple, and Raising Arizona), where editing counts for everything, one would think that he would know which frames to keep and which frames to toss. Instead, scenes are often monotonous, disorganized or, as is the case of the climactic conflict, go on far too long, losing all effectiveness. Sonnenfeld could have delivered a film that packed laughs after laugh with a rapid-fire punch; instead, his Addams Family has one foot in the grave.

Volunteer: With the Poor in Peru is a mixed bag

Volunteer: With the Poor in Peru

By Jeff Thielman and POOR IN PERU

By ELAINE MCCORMICK

Are you considering volunteering with an overseas development agency, like Peace Corps, Oxfam, or VISTA? Then you might want to check out Jeff Thielman’s Volunteer: With the Poor in Peru. The book is definitely a mixed bag. It’s poorly organized, unevenly paced and heavy-handed, but its story is compelling. Unlike many handbook books that are full of helpful warning scenes of volunteers in complete support with their village, surrounded by smiling children and grateful parents, Thielman’s book describes the nitty-gritty — the perils and frustrations of a volunteer experience. His book often reads like a guide as to how to avoid as a volunteer. The Tech’s arts editor handled the book to me, since I’d just returned from two years with the Peace Corps. In reading, I was surprised by how many of Thielman’s problems were due to the deficiencies of his program, the Boston College International Volunteer Program, which is sponsored by the Jesuits. He was accepted into the program to be a teacher of English, history and religion, and a basketball coach at a Jesuit secondary school. Had his program’s administrators done a more careful selection process, they would have realized that he was completely unqualified for coaching basketball. Then he might have been spared the humiliation of attempting to teach something which he freely admits, “I knew nothing about.” His first few months of confusion, depression and failure in Tana, Peru could also have been avoided had his program bothered to train him. Instead, he went

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