

MOVIES

'Danny Rose' Spoiled by Ethnic Stereotypes

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — Woody Allen's latest, "Broadway Danny Rose" (Fox) is a slyly amusing 80 minutes long. It's also quite modest in terms of what it's trying to do.

Allen's last film, "Zelig," a "Citizen Kane"-style satire, was a departure for him, but "Broadway Danny Rose" represents a return to his pre-"Annie Hall" period. Instead of playing himself, as he has been doing since "Annie Hall" — with "Zelig" as a notable exception — Allen attempts here to play an actual character.

His Danny Rose is a soft-hearted theatrical agent who dreams dreams. He communicates his sustaining vision, bolstered by the Jewish folk wisdom passed on to him by various aunts and uncles, to a sorry collection of fourth-rate performers — trainers of songbirds and penguins, balloon folders, a ventriloquist, a blind xylophonist. (Personally, I find Allen's habit of wringing laughs out of handicaps only slightly more palatable than the sophomoric cruelty of the National Lampoon crowd.)

Nobody, but nobody, believes in these people the way Danny does. Nobody, but nobody, is willing to work for them the way Danny does.

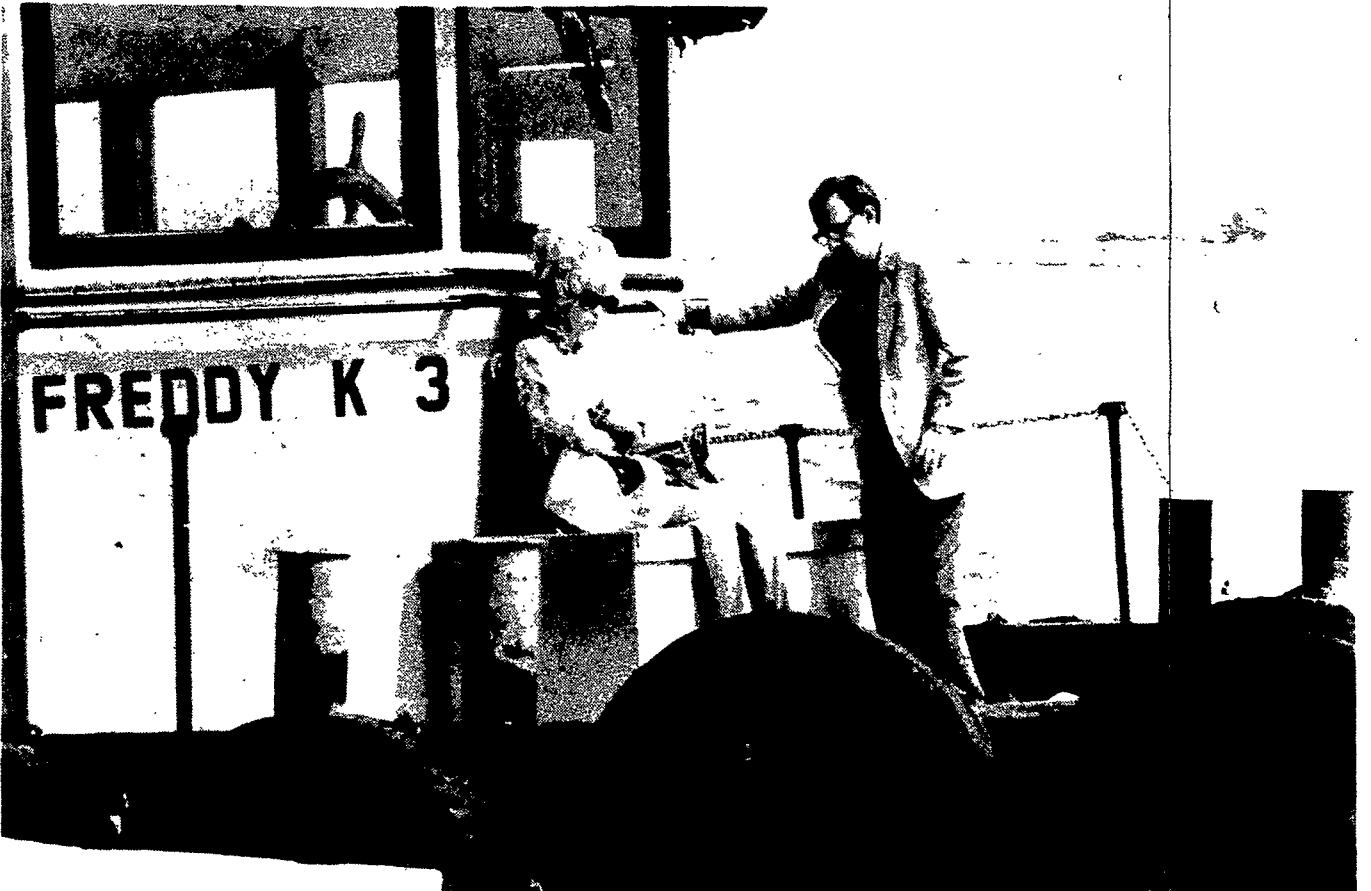
At the moment, Danny is striving with special fervor on behalf of Lou Canova (Nick Apollo Forte), an overweight, over-age Italian balladeer who is just barely a has-been rather than a never-was. He made the charts, you see, for a brief, heady moment in the '50s with a record on indigestion.

Though he's married and has two children, Lou is in love with a brassy, tough blond named Tina Vitale (Mia Farrow) who, unknown to Danny, is badmouthing him and urging Lou to get a manager who can do something for him.

Thanks to the rising nostalgia craze and Danny's hard work, Lou gets an engagement at the Waldorf. He insists that Tina must be there, and so the innocent Danny sets out for the terra incognita of New Jersey to fetch her from her highrise.

Tina, miffed at Lou, pursued by Danny, goes off to a Mafia house party so gross as to make the celebrated wedding that opens "The Godfather" look like a wine and cheese gathering of Upper West Side intellectuals.

Due to a series of complications, Danny becomes the target of a couple of moronic hit men who pursue the fun couple through the marshes of New Jersey and bind them together in a warehouse, a fate considerably better than death, that they eventually escape.



Woody Allen in the title role of "Broadway Danny Rose." In this scene on a tugboat crossing the Hudson River, he tells Tina Vitale (Mia Farrow), the widow of a bumped-off gangster, that he is getting seasick. (NC Photo)

Though Danny has worked so hard for him and risked so much, Lou, immediately after his Waldorf success, unceremoniously fires him just as Tina has been urging all along. But all is not lost for our hero.

The flavor of "Broadway Danny Rose" would be very much the Damon Runyonesque if it was even rescued and if it had even a touch of the toughness that funnier in fun from sentimentality.

As usual, Allen is generous in showering virtues on the character he plays. But if his Jewish hero is a near-saint, his Italians, who make up most of the other people in the movie, fare considerably less well. With the exception of

Tina, who is capable of undergoing a change of heart once exposed to Danny's goodness, they are invariably portrayed in the worst possible manner — stupid, superstitious, greedy, gluttonous, violent, immoral and without a vestige of culture.

Though the movie is otherwise innocuous, the U.S. Catholic Conference, because of this offensive ethnic stereotyping, has classified it A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Box Office Stats Teach Awful Lesson

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — "Variety's" annual tabulation of the box office statistics for the previous year in the American and Canadian market is usually an occasion for sober reflection, and this year is no exception.

The top 10, in terms of the rentals returned to their distributor (not total of tickets sold), are headed by "Return of the Jedi," whose \$165.5 million immediately puts it into third place on the list of all-time money-makers, right behind "E.T." (\$209 million) and "Star Wars" (\$193 million). This total is nearly twice that of runner-up "Tootsie," whose \$94 million nonetheless puts it into eighth place on the all-time list as the most lucrative comedy ever made.

Here's the rest of the top 10, with dollar figures in the millions: "Trading Places" (\$40), "War Games" (\$36), "Superman II" (\$36), "Flashdance" (\$36), "Staying Alive" (\$36), "Octopussy" (\$33), "Mr. Mom" (\$31), and "48 Hours" (\$30).

George Lucas cleaning up again with "The Return of the Jedi" was a foregone conclusion, and it was, after all, solid entertainment for all those still not bored by laser beams and special effects.

And it is cheering that a very good picture, "Tootsie," finished second and that an innocent and unheralded comedy like "Mr. Mom" could land in the top 10.

Less cheering but no cause for excessive weeping and wailing was the Trading Places," which at least had a very funny Eddie Murphy going for it.

The success of "Flashdance" and "Staying Alive," both panned universally, is harder to take as is that of the "sexploitation" films aimed at the teen-ager: "Risky Business" (\$29), "Porky's II" (\$17.5) ("Spring Break" (\$11), and "Class" (\$10).

What's worse, even such tributory (not total) ticket sales in this genre as "My Tutor" (\$7) and "Private School" (\$6) finished well ahead of "Educating Rita," (\$3.4) behind "Fire," (\$3), "Local Hero" (\$2.8), "Tender Mercies" (\$2.5) and "Testament" (\$1), which were favorably reviewed by most critics and were on the U.S. Catholic Conference's Best 10 list.

"Tender Mercies" and "Testament," moreover, the latter a much more cogent depiction of the peril represented by nuclear war than the highly publicized "The Day After," also are slated to receive Christopher Awards, the only films so honored this year.

Also finishing ahead of the USCC selections were such gems as "The Entity," "Revenge of the Ninja," "Sting II," "Sorcerer," "Amityville 3-D" "Spacehunter," and "Yellowbeard," all of which were either not reviewed or reviewed only to be reviled.

You don't have to be a bluenose moralist or an effete snob to be taken aback at all this.

And what are we to make of the fate of another USCC Best 10 selection, "The Right Stuff"? This flawed but immensely entertaining movie has, despite the almost universal praise of the critics and a cover story in Time, taken in only \$6 million so

far, ranking 54th on Variety's list, sandwiched between "The Entity" and "Cheech and Chong Still Smoking" — the latter the last gasp, or puff, of the Cheech and Chong saga.

Consider also "The Right Stuff's" \$6 million, not only in comparison to the \$36 million-plus of the execrable "Flashdance," a movie I'm sure you have heard about, but also with the \$24 million of "The Toy," which you may not have. The latter, a comedy, was a dismal remake of a few years ago.

"The Toy," in fact finished in 17th place, a notch above — are you ready for this? — "Gandhi," which swept the Academy Awards in 1982.

And just two down from "Gandhi" nestles Clint Eastwood's latest Dirty Harry outing — the brutal, radically immoral "Sudden Impact," which took in \$23 million.

Let's you want to interpret this as a victory for non-violence over violence, the awkward fact is that "Gandhi" was released 14 months ahead of the Eastwood cruncher, which is

bound to be one of the big moneymakers of all time, having racked up its current total in a single month.

And while we're on the subject of Eastwood-like simple solutions, both Bond epics did quite well, thank you, with Sean Connery's "Never Say Never Again" finishing behind Roger Moore's "Octopussy" (\$33) but with a respectable \$25 million.

The main conclusion I draw from all this is that American moviegoers turned out most enthusiastically in

1983 for fantasy, laughs and sex. Of special note was their fondness for movies that made them feel good about nuclear peril and crime in the streets by trivializing them. I need only point out the Bond movies, "War Games," "48 Hours," and "Sudden Im-

Pundits have often observed that humanity can't bear too much reality. All well and good, but to ignore it utterly, trusting to somebody else to make the right decisions, represents a kind of neglect that is scarcely benign.

Capsule Movie Reviews

"Love Letters" (New World)

Jamie Lee Curtis plays a disc jockey who becomes involved in an obsessive affair with a married man. She is inspired to risk all for love, it seems, by the discovery of some old letters that indicate that her dead mother had had a great love in her life. Written and directed by Amy Jones, this is a contrived, sentimental film filled with nudity and graphic sexuality. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

"The Lonely Guy" (Universal)

Steve Martin plays a writer of greeting-card verses thrown out by his lover. He wanders into Central Park clutching a checkerboard, a high intensity light and a couple of saltcases. When he sits down disconsolately on a park bench, he's joined by Charles Grodin, similarly battered. Grodin initiates Martin into the Lonely Guy fraternity, and teaches him such things as the supportive value of ferns (you treat them like persons, and they'll watch pro football with you) and lifesize celebrity cutouts. What sparse humor the movie has stems from these encounters between Martin and Grodin. Much less funny is Martin's hectic pursuit of Judith Ivey, who flees him precisely because they're so right for each other. Directed by Arthur Hiller, and based on a book by Bruce Jay Friedman adapted by Neil Simon, the film has a script written by two other guys, presumably not lonely in such a crowd: Ed Weinberger and Stan Daniels. The sexually-oriented humor, though relatively restrained, makes this adult fare. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-III — adults, and the Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance.

"Scandalous" (Orion)

This is an attempt at concocting a sophisticated comedy-mystery from 100 percent pure eschat ingredients. A television journalist (Robert Hays), burdened with an unloving but rich wife, is working an expose of an uncle-niece team of con-artists (John Gielgud and Pamela Stephenson), when he suddenly finds himself accused of murdering his spouse. It's been directed by Rob Cohen with a screenplay by Cohen and John Byron from a story by Larry Cohen, Rob Cohen and Byron — a combined effort that recalls the old saying about the cooks and the batter. The beautiful Miss Stephenson survives the debacle, and so does Gielgud (just barely, however, since, among other things, he has to dress in black leather at a punk rock concert), but Hays and Jim Dale, as a hyperactive Scotland Yard inspector, go down in flames, a fate Hays avoided in his two "Airplane" outings. Because of its sexually-oriented humor, it has been classified A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance.

"Slayground" (Universal)

When, after an armored car robbery, the getaway car crashes into a limousine, killing the young daughter of a millionaire, the victim's father hires a professional hitman to track down the leader of the gang (Peter Coyote), a sensitive fellow despite his profession, who feels very bad about the whole thing. Directed by Terry Bedford and written by Trevor Preston from a novel by Richard Stark, this is a run-of-the-mill chase picture with some pretentious literary overtones. Because of its violence, it has been classified A-III — adults — by the U.S. Catholic Conference. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.