

Features

# Pee-wee's 'Big Top' is consistently entertaining

By Judith Trojan

New York (NC) — Pee-wee Herman has almost grown up for his latest big-screen extravaganza, "Big Top Pee-wee" (Paramount), but not quite. Pee-wee (Paul Reubens), the prepubescent child-man who reigns over the innovative television show "Pee-wee's Playhouse," flirts with tricky business in his new film when he takes the big plunge to adulthood.

As crazy or improbable as his sounds, it works. Much more than his Saturday morning show, big-budgeted "Big Top" allows Pee-wee and his director, Randal Kleiser ("Grease"), to create a fantasy world so gloriously Edenlike that Pee-wee's burgeoning manhood seems to flow naturally from his environment.

As master of a bucolic farm that could only exist in story books, Pee-wee opens the show as a gentleman farmer who has more than petting acquaintance with his barnyard menagerie. His best chum is *bon vivant* Vance the talking pig, but the other animals also do well by Pee-wee.

Kids will love the film's opening moments, as Pee-wee awakens to a brand new day with Vance at his side and the rest of his barnyard pals snug in their beds in the barn. The gang convenes over a breakfast of flapjacks (flapped by the animals), freshly picked fruits and chocolate milk squeezed from the cow.

Pee-wee is engaged to the town's beautiful schoolmarm, Winnie (Penelope Ann Miller), who keeps him at arm's length despite his boyish need to get closer. As chaste and comical as their relationship seems, Pee-wee has hotter things in store when he sets eye on young trapeze artist Gina Piccolapupula (Valerie Golino), who travels with a circus that crashes on Pee-wee's property.

The circus — full of zany, classic performers (a wolf boy, half-man/half-woman, bearded lady and mermaid, among others) and wild animals — provides many colorful and charming moments, as does Pee-wee's attempt to master a circus act all his own.

Too much press ballyhoo has been devoted to Pee-wee's first screen kiss with Gina and implications of his loss of virginity, symbolized briefly by hackneyed image of erupting fireworks and volcanoes. The former is long but chaste, and the latter will slide over kids' heads but not be lost on adults.

In making the transition from bizarre asexual child to normal young man, Pee-wee shrewdly broadens his appeal and longevity, opening himself to more accessible screen projects. But kids have nothing to worry about. Pee-wee is still young at heart; even the circus ringmaster (Kris Kristofferson) riotously calls him "son."

Paul Reubens (also known as Pee-wee Herman) co-wrote and produced this film, filling it with many of the Pee-wee mannerisms and bits of business that kids love so much. Director Kleiser keeps the film moving along, balancing subtle comic vignettes with antic escapades, all of which are sometimes overshadowed by the gorgeous set design and cinematography.

"Big Top Pee-wee" is a consistently entertaining film that will delight Pee-wee fans of most persuasions.

Due to some sexual innuendo, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### Mr. North

Based on Thornton Wilder's last novel published in 1973, "Mr. North" (Goldwyn) is the first film directed by Danny Huston and the last to be touched by his father, John Huston, who served as executive producer and co-writer. Unfortunately, Huston died before he could play the pivotal role of incontinent, mansion-bound millionaire James McHenry Bosworth, a role that fizzles in the hands of Robert Mitchum.

Theophilus North (Anthony Edwards) is a plucky Yale grad who crashes Newport, R.I.,



MR. NORTH — Theophilus North, played by Anthony Edwards, is about to demonstrate his "special gift" of creating static as he reaches out to touch the nose of a small boy.

in the summer of 1926 to tutor bratty rich kids and soak up some adventure. He doesn't have to wait long to make a splash, however, since he simply won't play patsy for his snooty employers. Sassy, sweet-natured Theophilus has the kind of charm that ingratiates him with the nicest people in town, from chambermaids and butlers to rich Mr. Bosworth.

The greedy, spoiled segment of Newport society just can't stand the fellow, which has much to do with his growing reputation as a healer. Although he takes no credit for curing old Boswell's bladder or a debutante's migraines, Theophilus has the oddball ability to give off powerful electric shocks. Pursued by the rich and poor to mend what ails them, and by the town's quack physician who is fast losing his rich clientele, Theophilus is pushed into the kind of limelight that not even he bargained for.

Edwards has the period look for Mr. North, but his is not an electrifying performance. Mitchum lazes through his role as North's mentor, but a variety of notables stand out in

small character roles, including Miss Master-son as migraine sufferer Elspeth Skeel, Harry Dean Stanton as a savvy butler, Lauren Bacall as a worldly boardinghouse keeper and Angelica Huston as Bosworth's elusive daughter, Persis.

Since this was filmed in Newport, the sets and exteriors are the real thing and wonderfully capture the feel for the pre-war period when the great houses were in their prime. Technically, the film is uneven. The lighting is downright amateurish in some exterior scenes, and individual vignettes work better than the whole. Although this probably would have played better on public television than in theaters, it is breezy, literate entertainment that contains nothing to offend, much good-natured fun and a rare, positive, youthful character whose desire to be a vagabond can only be taken in the best sense of the word.

Due to some mild vulgar references, the USCC is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

## Jesus wasn't kidding when he said 'Turn the other cheek'

By Michael Warren  
NC News Service

Many young people who consider themselves Christians think it's a "downer" when someone suggests taking Jesus and his vision of reality seriously.

Jesus' way is so far removed from the way life is imagined in most television programs and films that it seems to be coming to us from the moon.

But I believe there is more truth in Jesus' way, more challenge, more beauty and more common sense than is found in any afternoon soap opera.

How does Jesus imagine our lives? First, He imagines us connected to one another, as brothers and sisters given life by one Creator.

Jesus proposes we treat our neighbor with reverence bordering on awe. He goes further, imagining that the least should be most cherished: the lepers, the maimed, those in

## Coming of Age

anguish.

He imagines that those of us with privileges owe something to those with none because God calls us to do so. In Jesus' view, people living in the Soviet Republic of Georgia deserve the same reverence as those living in the U.S. state of Georgia.

He imagines the last judgment, and in His depiction of it, the ones called to God's presence in the kingdom are those who cared for the sick, visited those in prison, gave food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, and welcomed the stranger.

In Jesus' imagination of the scene, God tells everyone that when people do these things to the least of their sisters and brothers, they do them to the very person of God Himself.

Second, Jesus imagines the world as non-violent. Forgiveness of one another is so essential that a person should leave the place of worship and make up with enemies before presuming to worship God.

Notice that Jesus doesn't imagine a world without conflict. There was plenty of conflict in His own life, much of which He Himself initiated. But Jesus imagines, and claims it is God's way, that human beings must respect one another's dignity and even cherish it.

In today's world of destructive weapons where many men and women worldwide are trained as killers, this is an aspect of Jesus' imagination of our lives that is not so easy to keep hold of.

Many young people I have talked to see Je-

sus' call to turn the other cheek as a kind of cruel joke. Yet, at His death Jesus asked God's forgiveness for those who were taking His life.

The early Church understood all this well, as we can see in Timothy's second letter (2:22-24): "Turn your back on the turbulent desires of youth and give positive attention to goodness, faith, love and peace ... Have nothing to do with silly and ill-informed controversies which lead inevitably ... to strife. And the Lord's servant must not be a person of strife."

Jesus also imagines us living a life astonished at God's goodness, offering constant thanks in prayer. Jesus imagines us trusting God.

Jesus imagines us sharing what we have with others, even when we think there may not be enough for ourselves — the way He had the disciples give away their own small lunch.

Jesus' imagination of our lives is not glib or glittery. Neither is it popular. But it is true and good and worth trying to realize.

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**HOUSE OF GUITARS**  
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We received 16 correct entries identifying Dweezil Zappa as the son of Frank Zappa

The winner was Cami Vella of Rochester

**MUSIC TRIVIA**

**This week's question:**  
 Who recorded the song "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head?"

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 School \_\_\_\_\_

**Rules:**  
 Each week, the Courier-Journal, in conjunction with the House of Guitars will feature a Music Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon, and send it in to the Courier-Journal. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn. If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave.

All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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 1150 Buffalo Rd.  
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We received 5 correct entries identifying the Boston Marathon as the renowned marathon that was first held in 1897.

The winner was John C. Barney of Rochester

**SPORTS TRIVIA**

**This week's question:**  
 How did Montreal Expos second baseman Ron Hunt reach base a record 50 times in 1971?

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 School \_\_\_\_\_

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All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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