

Entertainment

The little guys finish on top in 'Things Change'

By Judith Trojan

New York (NC) — For a fictional slice of mob life that keeps audiences entertained without resorting to sex, violence or monumental special effects, try "Things Change" (Columbia), a small movie with a big heart.

The film is dominated by the controlled and totally endearing performance of Don Ameche as Gino, an elderly Chicago shoeshine man who is summoned to pose as a look-alike mob boss about to be tagged for murder. As the mobster's double, Gino will stand trial, serve a three-to-five-year prison term, and be rewarded with a fishing boat and a new home in Sicily at the end of his ordeal. In lieu of cement shoes, Gino promises on his honor to uphold his side of the bargain.

A down-and-out mobster named Jerry (Joe Mantegna) is given the choice assignment of coaching Gino in the fine points of his crime testimony. Put on probation by the hoods for bungling his last job, Jerry is simply too nice for mob life, a fact that quickly becomes evident when his attachment to the old man outweighs his obligation to the mob.

Directed by playwright David Mamet ("House of Games"), who also co-wrote the screenplay with children's author Shel Silverstein, "Things Change" follows Jerry's attempts to give Gino one last weekend fling before he goes to the slammer for the crime he didn't commit.

The luxury weekend in Lake Tahoe, unauthorized by Jerry's bosses, turns from fantasy into a nightmare of sorts when Gino's disguise works too well and he and Jerry get taken under the wing of a local don (Robert Prosky).

As written and directed by Mamet in his usual stagey way, words and not actions are the key to the film's dramatic and subtle comedic tension. Ameche says very little, but he plays to perfection his role as the Italian-accented, dignified man whose only crime is his sense of honor. A quick study, Gino ultimately must not only rescue himself from the lying clutches of the mob, but also save Jerry, whose generosity is always one step ahead of his common sense.

There are no great laughs here, only chuckles, some poignancy and the good feeling that comes when the little guys finish first. Although Mamet mishandles his positive ending, which will cause a letdown of sorts, "Things Change" is a well-written character study with spare dialogue, a most improbably pair of buddies and an interesting, ironic look at honor among thieves.

Due to some rough language, the humorous glamorization of mob life and brief violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Mystic Pizza'

A coming-of-age story about three young women on the verge of adulthood, "Mystic Pizza" seems destined for development as a future TV series. With the current series "thirtysomething" a roaring success, "Mystic Pizza," the TV series, would be a perfect draw for those in the 20-something age bracket.

Set in the Portugese-American community in the seaport tourist town of Mystic, Conn., three young women are caught up in the uncertainties of love and romance and fears for

'Blithe Spirit' scheduled for Kearney this weekend

Bishop Kearney High School will present Noel Coward's play, "Blithe Spirit," at 8 p.m. on Friday, November 18, and Saturday, November 19, in the school auditorium, 125 Kings Hwy. S., Rochester.

Coward's comedy explores the laughable mishaps of a man who is the subject of mischievous harassment by his deceased wife's spirit, which has been resurrected at a medium's seance.

Among the cast members will be Cynthia Menz as Mrs. Condomine I, Kris Puehn as Mrs. Condomine II, and Noel Franus as Mr. Condomine, the hassled husband. The production also features Michael Dagon as Dr. Bradman, Jennifer Kuhn as Mrs. Bradman, Alice Wolpiuk as the maid, and Manisha Patel as the eerie Madame Arcati.

Tickets for "Blithe Spirit" may be purchased at the auditorium door. Parking is free. Call the school at 716/342-4000 for more information.



MOB LIFE — Don Ameche (right) and Joe Mantegna star in "Things Change," which the U.S. Catholic Conference describes as "a fictional slice of mob life that keeps audiences entertained without resorting to sex, violence or monumental special effects."

their respective futures. All three work in the Mystic Pizza Parlor, noted for its secret Portuguese pizza sauce. Beautiful Daisy Araujo (Julia Roberts) is a temptress who has no trouble attracting men. She sets her sights on rich, aimless Charles Gordon Winsor (Adam Storke), but finds that despite his wealth and background, he's not good enough for her.

Daisy's younger sister Kat (Annabeth Gish) is smart, ambitious and vulnerable to the attentions of a young, accomplished married man (William R. Moses) who hires her to babysit for his child. Juggling four jobs to pay for her midyear entry into Yale, Kat has had no time to experience romance and is no match for it when it finally arrives.

Spunky Jojo Barboza (Lili Taylor) opens and closes the film at her wedding to fisherman Bill Montijo (Vincent Phillip D'Onofrio), a wedding that is initially short-circuited when she faints during her vows. At first unable to face a lifetime commitment to Bill, Jojo cops out, but continues to make sexual demands on Bill. When Bill finally refuses to be her sex object and pushes for marriage or nothing, Jojo is forced uneasily to make an adult decision and commitment.

While the lives and loves of these "townies" — as opposed to the rich tourists who flood the seaport town — are not earthshaking, their milieu within the Portugese-American fishing community and their jobs at Mystic Pizza, owned and operated by warm and supportive Leona (Conchata Ferrell), provide a unique vantage point from which to watch these girls wobble into womanhood.

Although not nearly as good a film as the male townie coming-of-age film, "Breaking Away," "Mystic Pizza" explores a similar predicament faced by young people excluded by virtue of their working-class roots and ethnicity from taking full advantage of their town's place in the sun.

The film's three young actresses are wonderful in their somewhat stereotypic roles. Miss Gish has serious acting potential and Miss Taylor has a flair for farce. Miss Roberts (Eric Roberts' sister) is a ravishing film presence and will not be at a loss for roles once she fine-tunes her acting skills.

As directed by Donald Petrie, who is making his feature debut with this film, "Mystic Pizza" is a small, but tantalizing slice of life that will send audiences drooling to their local pizzerias at its upbeat ending. But the girls' indiscriminate sexual behavior, although frowned upon by their parents and the Catholic Church to which all belong, continues unchecked with little if any respect for their parents' or the Church's point of view.

Due to much explicit sex banter and off-camera sexual liaisons between the young, unmarried couples and the clear implication of

one girl's loss of virginity to a married man, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'A Cry in the Dark'

"A Cry in the Dark" (Warner Bros.) is the grim, real-life story of Lindy and Michael Chamberlain, Australians who were accused and convicted of killing their 9-week-old daughter, Azaria, in 1980.

Despite no clear evidence against them, the Chamberlains were the victims of the most horrifying media witch hunt this side of Salem. Lasting over five years, the media circus that inspired their arrest and conviction fanned mass hysteria and directly influenced judicial procedure. There were bizarre stories of religious cult sacrifice — the Chamberlains were devout Seventh-day

Capsules

"Everybody's All-American" (Warner Bros)

The romantic 25-year saga of the rise and fall of a Louisiana football hero (Dennis Quaid) and his Southern belle wife (Jessica Lange). Never able to recapture the glory he won as a top-flight college running back, the jock enters the pros but deteriorates into a living relic whose self-esteem hinges on faded memories of past football triumphs. His wife overcomes her beauty queen past, and after salvaging her husband's irresponsible business dealings forges a successful career for herself. Aside from the changing roles and fortunes of this golden couple, director Taylor Hackford also peripherally touches on integration and other cultural changes affecting the South from 1956-81. A highly entertaining, splendidly acted romance that inspires thought about the responsibilities of being a hero, the implications of hero worship and the coping strategies needed to survive fleeting fame. Two brief sexually explicit scenes, a flash of nudity and marital infidelity, brief bloody violence and some vulgar language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

"Madame Sousatzka" (Universal)

A cross between Auntie Mame and a storm trooper, Madame Sousatzka (Shirley MacLaine) is the kind of eccentric musical artiste who achieves her greatest glory as teacher not performer. Well past middle age and a tad seedy, she focuses her life on her talented piano students, in this case a virtuoso 15-year-old Indian boy (Navin Chowdhry) who becomes her obsession. Miss MacLaine is terrific in this rich character

Adventists — personal gossip, innuendo and more concern for protecting tourism to the murder site than the rights of a grieving mother.

As re-created here by Australian director Fred Schepisi ("Roxanne") from John Bryson's book, the baby's disappearance during a camping trip at Australia's most historic rustic landmark, Ayers Rock, was most decidedly the work of a hungry dingo. While a dingo, or wild dog, was seen by Lindy running from their tent, the baby's body was never found.

What was found, however, was the baby's supposedly neatly folded jumpsuit that indicated to inadequate forensic investigation that bloody human hands had touched the baby. This and other poorly acquired evidence turned Lindy (Meryl Streep), also the mother of two young boys, into a baby killer and her husband Michael (Sam Neill) into an accomplice.

An Adventist pastor, Michael saw his beliefs distorted by the public's burgeoning religious intolerance. Initially too trusting and accessible to the press, an action the Chamberlains lived to regret, the couple became so harassed by the media that they faced a crisis of faith and soon turned a cold shoulder to the world. Lindy's supposed lack of emotion and a new pregnancy also were used against her.

"A Cry in the Dark" is a somber film that explores the frightening consequences of mass hysteria. The power of the media to indiscriminately make or break individuals and to influence public opinion by distorting reality despite evidence to the contrary is a reality we all must confront. In the case of the Chamberlains, the dingos seemed to have more credibility than Lindy. Since her accusations against the dogs directly cut into tourism at one of Australia's most scenic sites, the canines, not Lindy, were supported by public relations mavens.

A blatant reminder that the forces of religious intolerance and social injustice are still with us, "A Cry in the Dark" will, however, be a difficult film for American audiences to warm up to. Although stirringly portrayed by Miss Streep and Neill, Lindy and Michael remain enigmas to the end. And the barren Australian landscape and lengthy court proceedings will distance rather than involve most viewers.

Due to some graphic discussion and visuals recreating the brutal killing of a baby by a wild dog, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

role. A warm, winning film directed and co-written by John Schlesinger. An off-camera adulterous affair, the boy's implied loss of virginity to a young adult and some rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

"They Live" (Universal)

An alien race disguised as Yuppies secretly infiltrates U.S. cities and lulls Americans into submission through subliminal media advertising. Intended by director-writer John Carpenter as a biting satire of the fundamentalist right and its rise to power through the Reagan administration, this horror film is a bust due to bad casting (professional wrestler Roddy Piper stars) and a poorly realized script. Mindless violence and much profanity. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

AMERICAN INDIAN CUSTOMS

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