

## Entertainment

# Christmas-season movie offerings garner mixed reviews

## Rubber-mouthed 'Ernest' earns holiday hoots

By Judith Trojan

NEW YORK (NC) — Ernest P. Worrell (Jim Varney) is back in "Ernest Saves Christmas" (Touchstone), a surprisingly entertaining holiday hoot for the young at heart.

The rubber-mouthed TV pitchman and star of "Ernest Goes to Camp" is currently cooling his heels as a Florida caddy. When Santa Claus (Douglas Seale) thumbs a ride at Orlando airport on December 23, bedecked in a three-piece business suit with a red velvet sack slung over his shoulder, Ernest is the perfect caddy for the job. It seems Santa has arrived in town to pass his waning powers — he's 151 years old and his memory's failing — over to the perfect replacement, a local TV celebrity, Joe Carruthers (Oliver Clark), whose children's show was cruelly canceled.

Thus, we follow the 11th-hour travails of Ernest as he aids and abets Santa, who manages to get thrown in the slammer, misplace his magical bag twice and provoke gentle Joe, who is tempted to rejuvenate his career with a role in the slasher movie "Christmas Slay."

Several entertaining subplots come together nicely in the end. There's a cute runaway

(Noelle Parker), who is redeemed from a life of lying and stealing, thanks to her friendship with Santa and Ernest. And Santa's reindeer do much to disconcert the dimwitted airport baggage handlers, especially when the critters escape from their crates and begin to walk on the ceiling.

"Ernest Saves Christmas" has some real laughs — Varney is comical in an assortment of surprising character disguises — and enough virtues to make it a perennial Christmas favorite. There is no foul language — Joe even turns down his big film break because he refuses to swear — and Santa is played to sweet and dignified perfection throughout by Seale. Ad man director John Cherry fills his sets with overt product plugs, but audiences will be more easily diverted by the uncommercial moral of the story.

Due to Ernest's anarchistic driving skills, which cause some cartoonish traffic pile-ups and tense moments on the highway and in the sky, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.



NC News  
Know-it-all Ernest P. Worrell, played by comedian Jim Varney, gives Santa's elves a hand in "Ernest Saves Christmas." The U.S. Catholic Conference calls the film "a surprisingly entertaining holiday hoot for the young at heart."

## Undeveloped characters sink 'Fresh Horses'

"Fresh Horses" (Columbia) tracks the downward spiral of a bright, level-headed college senior after he dumps his wealthy fiancée for a seductive high-school dropout too young, uneducated and married to give him anything but grief.

As soon as preppy Matt (Andrew McCarthy) meets sullen, seedy Jewel (Molly Ringwald), sparks fly, and Matt gives the heave-ho to the good life. Obsessed with the red-headed miss who may be 16 or 20, who has trouble with grammar and the truth, Matt confuses lust with love and never looks back. He can't accept Jewel's obvious limitations, but neither can he shake the need to play knight in shining armor to his little waif. This boy needs help.

McCarthy does as much as he can with the underdeveloped character of Matt. The need to bail out of a too-early marriage is reasonable, but Matt's relationship with Jewel is so

empty and dead-headed that the whole thing smacks of soapsuds. Ringwald is also convincing as the abused child-woman Jewel, but her role is equally bland and one-dimensional.

Director David Anspaugh ("Hoosiers") has a nice touch with rural and campus settings, but he's at a loss with these characters. Basically a mood piece about obsession, "Fresh Horses" lets too many intriguing plot elements — Jewel's abusive parents and husband, the couple's class conflicts and Matt's real agony — slip through the cracks. In the end, although Jewel sensibly rejects Matt, she miraculously turns her life around by his good example.

Due to some minimal rough language, a brief incident of violence and off-camera illicit sexual commingling, the USCC is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## Animated 'Land Before Time' could be classic

"The Land Before Time" (Universal) is a sweet-natured, if derivative animated children's feature, which could well become a classic.

Created by former Disney animator Don Bluth ("An American Tail"), "The Land Before Time" is set in prehistoric times when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. Unfortunately for the dinos, they were ill-attuned to surviving geological changes that jolted the planet, leaving them isolated, starving and ultimately extinct.

Narrator Pat Hingle simplifies the saga, dividing the beasts into meat eaters (sharp-teeth) and leaf eaters (flatteeth). Stranded in a leaf-barren homeland, a young brontosaurus named Littlefoot, his mother and grandparents head toward the Great Valley, a paradise promising all the leaves and fresh water they'll need to survive.

Sadly, an "earthquake" separates Littlefoot from his grandparents, and a marauding tyrannosaurus rex — a sharptooth — destroys his mother (the voice of Helen Shaver). But mom gives her only child the wisdom to follow his heart if not his head to the Great Valley, despite grief and initial loneliness.

Ultimately pairing up with four other young dinos of different species, similarly separated from their families, Littlefoot (the voice of Gabriel Damon) continues on to the Great Valley. Plagued by hunger and fear of the teeth-grashing tyrannosaurus which reappears at various intervals, the motley tykes do much to underscore the film's lovely message of brotherhood and courage in the face of adversity.

## Villa looking for 'St. Nicks'

St. Joseph's Villa is searching for "St. Nicks" to donate gifts and food items for the children, adolescents and families served by the agency.

For the children and teens in care, the Villa is asking for clothing, sporting equipment and gift items. For needy families, the agency is requesting food-baskets and gifts for children.

For information about participating in the program, contact the villa's development office at 716/865-1550, ext. 284.

## Volunteers needed to help Easter Seal Society office

The Easter Seal Society is in urgent need of several people to help manage its direct mail program, and to give general office support. Typing and computer skills are helpful, but not necessary.

Contact Peg Neufeglise at (716)232-2540 for information.

**10 WEEK SPECIAL**  
Duane Neu's Mobil Mart  
1508 Buffalo Road  
Ginger Ale, Sprite,  
Diet Sprite, Squirt  
2 Litre Bottles \$1.09  
2% Milk \$1.79  
Good only 12/11 - 12/17/88



Relax after  
the holidays  
with a  
good book

(716) 473-8634  
Mon-Fri. 10-5, Sat. 10-3  
935 East Ave., cor. Barrington St.

## Fine cast can't salvage 'Cocoon: The Return' from dull, contrived plot

In 1985, director Ron Howard gave a fine cast of veteran actors a chance to strut their stuff with joy and dignity in "Cocoon." Now the entire cast is back under Daniel Petrie's direction in "Cocoon: The Return" (Fox).

The good news is that the oldsters and Antarean aliens, after several years in outer space, are more charming and vivacious than ever. The bad news is that the current plot is dull and contrived, the direction is sluggish and the slapdash transitions between character vignettes are better suited to TV movies than high-budget feature films.

Sequels are tricky business, especially when they follow enormous hits. Other than its positive focus on vibrant senior citizens and its talented actors, who work overtime to add pizzazz to the cartoon plot, "Cocoon: The Return" has little else to recommend it.

Art (Don Ameche), Ben (Wilford Brimley)

and Joe (Hume Cronyn) have returned briefly to Earth with their wives, Bess (Gwen Verdon), Mary (Maureen Stapleton) and Alma (Jessica Tandy). They've arrived to help their alien friends save some endangered cocoons left behind on their last trip. The scenario follows the energized senior citizens as they grasp joyously at all the delights Earth has to offer. In their alien home, there is no aging, sickness or death — or hotdogs, baseball or grandchildren. While they feel and look great, each character must resolve the longings catalyzed by their return to Earth before they can leave again for good.

The focus on the seniors is delightful and relevant, and Ameche, Cronyn and Brimley do their best to counter crotchety aging stereotypes — personified here by Jack Gilford reprising his earthbound role as Bernie, an old crotchety whose morose complaints and continued

mourning for his deceased wife stop him from living life to the fullest. The women are more down-to-earth than their bon vivant husbands, however, so it is the ladies who more accurately reflect the conflicts faced by the returning earthlings.

The subplot about the endangered cocoons is poorly realized. Simple-minded and suspenseless, the rescue ends up as an afterthought to the film's main focus on the senior citizens. With a few forced chuckles and some rather distressing denouements for individual characters, "Cocoon: The Return" will surely disappoint fans of the original hit.

Due to some locker-room language and humor laced with mild sexual innuendo, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

## Founders' Club features Rosemary Clooney, 'White Christmas Show'

"May your days be merry and bright, and may all your Christmases be white." The "White Christmas" tradition begun by the late Bing Crosby is now carried on by his favorite singer, Rosemary Clooney, who will soon perform in Rochester.

The Founders Club of the Sisters of Mercy will bring Clooney's "White Christmas Show" to the Eastman Theatre on Sunday, Dec. 11, for two performances at 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Tickets, at \$8, \$12, \$16, \$20 and \$25, can be reserved by calling 716/288-4817.

This annual Founders' Club event, co-chaired this year by Sister Nancy Whitley and Gerard Guerinet, M.D., benefits the continuing-education fund of the Sisters of Mercy.

Clooney will be accompanied by John Oddo and the Sounds of Christmas Orchestra, as well as a children's chorus prepared by Sister Mary Leonia Didas and Phyllis Contestable, and an adult chorus of Sisters of Mercy and Friends, prepared by Sister Margaret Caulfield.

The program includes such popular holiday songs as "I'll Be Home for Christmas," "Count Your Blessings," "White Christmas," "Santa

Claus Is Coming to Town," "Sleigh Ride," "Carol of the Bells" and "Silent Night." The show also features film clips and Christmas decorations.

Within the past five months, Clooney has performed at Ford's Theater, Washington, D.C., for President and Mrs. Reagan; in two sold-out performances at the Hollywood Bowl, where she was the featured vocalist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and pianist Michael Feinstein; at Epcot Center at Disneyworld; and at Carnegie Hall, where she helped to celebrate Irving Berlin's 100th birthday by singing "White Christmas" and joining such music notables as Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and Leonard Bernstein for a CBS television special.

## Christmas cards available from handicapped students

Christmas cards — designed by students at the School of the Holy Childhood — are available for purchase this holiday season.

The cards, which are packaged in sets of 12 for \$5, are available at several Rochester stores as well as Holy Childhood's Development Office at (716)359-3710.

Proceeds from the sale of these cards go to the School of the Holy Childhood, a non-denominational, not-for-profit agency dedicated to the education of mentally handicapped children and adults.



Rosemary Clooney and Sister Nancy Whitley discuss the show.