

Heavy-handed trio fails to provide entertainment

By Judith Trojan
NC News

NEW YORK — Alan J. Pakula's "See You in the Morning" (Warner Bros.) is, for the most part, a heavy-handed study of the agonies faced by blended families. The film is also purported to be semiautobiographical, which probably explains Pakula's inability to distance himself sufficiently from the material.

As a result, "See You in the Morning" is chock-full of precious, pretentious moments that Pakula would have done well to cut.

Jumping back and forth between the sketchily outlined sagas of the Livingston and Goodwin families prior to, during and after their collapse, Pakula gives us lots of psycho-babble but little real insight into their troubles. Beth (Alice Krige) and Peter Goodwin (David Dukas) and their two adolescent children, Cathy (Drew Barrymore) and Petey (Lukas Haas), appear to be a happy family. But concert pianist Peter has some unexplained difficulty with his left hand. After it freezes up during a concert, he hits the skids and commits suicide, although none of this is covered directly in the screenplay.

The Livingstons are also a seemingly idyllic family. Larry (Jeff Bridges) is a psychiatrist married to gorgeous Jo (Farrah Fawcett). Her skyrocketing career as a commercial model has given Larry some unspecified reason to be jealous. Their kids are young and cute, and there's also a witty grandmother, Neenie (Frances Sternhagen), with a storybook Maine retreat.

When the suicide destroys Beth's marriage and divorce puts an end to Larry's, they meet through a mutual friend (Linda Lavin); fall in love, marry and settle down in Beth's Manhattan brownstone.

Most of the last half of the film covers Larry's congenial struggles to fit into his new household, win over Beth's kids and keep tabs on his own. Beth and Larry also have to deal with lots of psychological baggage from their first marriages.

The best sequences in the film focus on the children and the dog. Barrymore and Haas shine in the underdeveloped roles of good kids who have understandable trouble welcoming a stranger into their dad's home and mother's bed. And Larry's tiny daughter, Robin (Heather Lilly), seems to have a better grasp of Larry's failings than does Larry himself.

Bridges, Krige and Fawcett are attractive in their sketchily developed roles. Sternhagen is wasted in the good but small and ultimately tear-jerker role of Larry's wise mother-in-law. And Lavin will hopefully survive the embarrassment of playing Sidney, the family cupid.

Pakula, whose previous fine work includes "Sophie's Choice," "Klute" and "All the President's Men," has tried with this personal effort to get more than a superficial grip on the pain and humor surrounding blended or "musical" families, as they're called in the film. As he flits back and forth between the two families, past and present, Pakula seems uncomfortable with honest emotion. He takes the easy way out by overdosing his script with trendy banter and some heavy-handed sentiment, much of which will make audiences feel manipulated. Writer-director Woody Allen would have better handled Pakula's marital woes.

Due to some rough language and adult situations, 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.

'La Boheme'

Pucini's classical work "La Boheme" fails poorly in Luigi Comencini's updated film adaptation (New Yorker). Set in Paris, the film suffers from the Comencini's heavy directorial hand and his surprisingly unimaginative use of the film medium.

Barbara Hendricks has the voice but no inner fire to draw viewers to her performance as the frail but passionate Mimi. Mimi lives in poverty and survives by selling handmade paper flowers and embroidered goods. Her love affair with the penniless poet, Rodolfo (Luca Canonici, with the voice of Jose Carreras), is, of course, doomed by her ill health; but not before we hear them sing of love, jealousy and heartbreak, and watch as their more playful Bohemian friends, Marcello (Gino Quilico) and Musetta (Angela Maria Blasi), fall in and out of love.

Plagued with bad lighting, stiff performances by all except Blasi, who fires up the screen every time she appears, and choppy editing, "La Boheme" fails dismally to move beyond the most conventional use of film. It's also disconcerting to read that Rodolfo is being acted (woodenly) and sung (exquisitely) by two different men. That trick should have gone out with Audrey Hepburn's miscasting in "My Fair Lady." Serious opera and film buffs may wish to miss this one. Others can at least enjoy the music. Sung in Italian, with English subtitles.

Due to implied illicit sexual liaisons, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the MPAA.

'Checking Out'

Audiences would do well not to check



Farrah Fawcett (left), Jeff Bridges and Alice Krige star in "See You in the Morning." The U.S. Catholic Conference describes the film as a "heavy-handed study of the agonies faced by blended families."

out "Checking Out" (Warner Bros.), a tasteless, badly written comedy about one man's fear of mortality.

When airline executive Ray Macklin (Jeff Daniels) witnesses the sudden death of his best friend and business colleague (Allan Havey), he flips out. Although he's only 35, Ray becomes consumed with a fear of dying by coronary. Anxiety attacks, Type-A hypochondriasis and bizarre mood swings almost destroy him and drive his family, co-workers and doctors to distraction.

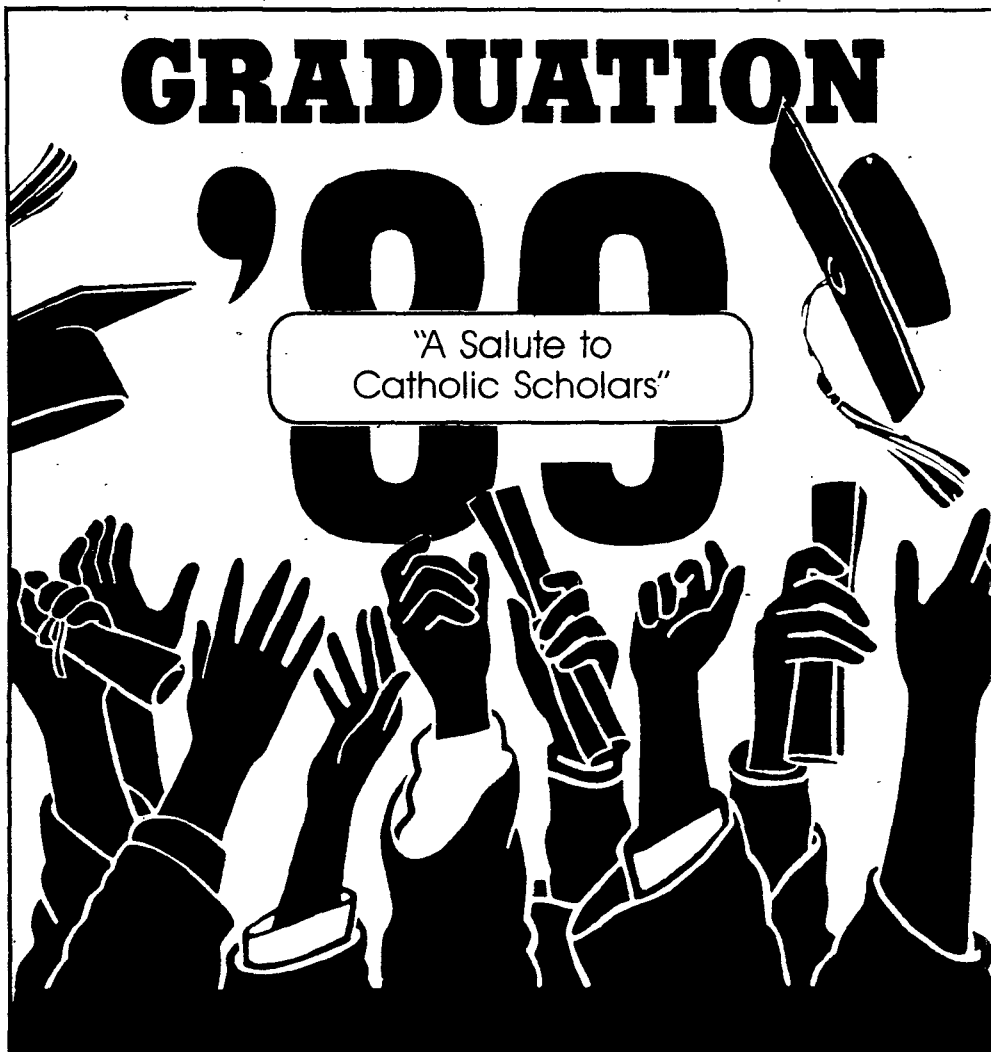
In his search for an illness, any illness, Ray also meets up with some heavy-duty wackos and ultimately makes a pit stop in heaven when his heart stops briefly during a routine appendectomy.

As envisioned by production designer Barbara Ling ("True Stories") and direc-

tor David Leland ("Wish You Were Here"), Ray's life before, during and after heaven looks like one big, bad cosmic joke.

"Checking Out" is weighed down with tasteless ethnic jokes, weary coronary jokes, numbing narcissism and a particularly dreary cast of characters. There's also a vulgar sex scene between the bleeding, practically comatose Ray and his desperate secretary on the front seat of his car in the office parking garage. The boss fires her because she's on top, which says a lot for the role of women in this tacky film. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Trojan is on the staff of the USCC Office for Film and Broadcasting.



In recognition of the Catholic high school seniors of the Rochester Diocese, the Catholic Courier will be featuring a special graduation supplement in the issue of June 1, 1989.

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