

Film recalls final flight of legendary bomber

NEW YORK (CNS) — The 25th and final bombing mission for World War II's "Memphis Belle" (Warner Bros.) turns out to be the most dangerous for its young 10-man crew.

The flyboys are hoping for a simple run over France, but their orders are to bomb a munitions factory deep in German enemy territory.

After foggy-weather delays which make the 10 edgy and quarrelsome, they take off in the giant B-17 Flying Fortress under the grim command of Capt. Dearborn (Matthew Modine).

The crew's bickering continues when Gene (Courtney Gains) accuses Jack (Neil Giuntoli) of deliberately losing his medal and the men discover Val (Billy Zane) lied about his medical expertise when Danny (Eric Stoltz) is gravely injured.

Under attack from smaller, swifter German aircraft and with their target obscured by heavy cloud cover, the captain orders a second go-round. With their chances for survival plummeting by the minute, the soldiers of the Memphis Belle pull together to finish the job they were sent out to do.

Under Michael Caton-Jones' direction, the film is an unabashedly old-fashioned patriotic movie inspired by the late director William Wyler's own Memphis Belle missions and his 1944 documentary of the same name.

Co-produced by his daughter Catherine,

the movie takes a leisurely pace in establishing its dozen different characters — some of whom look barely out of their teens. The large-cast film doesn't really take off until the fliers are airborne and in actual combat.

The flight scene is quite lengthy and allows for a convincing build-up of tension. The claustrophobic feeling within a huge, slow-moving plane under fire is clearly reflected in the fear and horror on the young men's faces. Danger comes alive and the pressures they are under are palpable.

The shot of the Memphis Belle's companion plane being sliced in half by a plummeting German aircraft is especially wrenching.

The camera work in the action scenes is vivid, and use of five original B-17s and 11 other war-era airships adds to the authenticity. Although there is nothing truly original or even fresh in this picture, it does engage the emotions in a rousing tale of bravery in the face of death.

Because of wartime violence, mild sexual innuendo and minimal rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.



Warner Bros., Inc. Warner Bros.' film "Memphis Belle," tells the story of a young flight crew's crucial bombing mission during World War II. Inspired by the late director William Wyler's Memphis Belle missions and his 1944 documentary of the same name, the film is an "unabashedly old-fashioned patriotic movie."

'Avalon' is too sentimental, but serves as family film

NEW YORK (CNS) — The pursuit of the American dream for three generations of a Russian immigrant family is fondly recalled in "Avalon" (Tri-Star).

Arriving in 1914 Baltimore during a Fourth of July fireworks celebration, Sam Krichinsky (Armin Mueller-Stahl), a Russian Jew, instantly falls in love with the land that has welcomed him with such a dramatic display. His four brothers have paid for his passage to join them in their Avalon neighborhood where they are all wallpaper-hangers.

The Krichinsky brothers watch with bemused pride as their own children embrace all things American.

Sons Jules and Izzy (Aidan Quinn and Kevin Pollak), who are cousins, go into the department-store business together but, shamefully, in their fathers' eyes, change their last names to Kirk and Kaye.

Still, family loyalty remains the lifeblood of the clan, sustaining them even as misfortune, quarrels and changing times make inevitable inroads over the years.

Writer/director Barry Levinson creates a vibrant family portrait and he extracts the most from his capable cast. Joan Plowright, the quibbling Jewish mother, forever corrects her husband Sam's



Tri-Star Pictures, Inc. Joan Plowright (from left) Armin Mueller-Stahl, Elizabeth, Aidan Quinn and Kevin Pollack star in "Avalon," the third film in director Barry Levinson's semi-autobiographical anthology.

memories — which are amusingly shown in his flashbacks and her embroidered versions. As Sam, Mueller-Stahl infuses the movie's central character with warmth and humanity.

Everyone is treated with such generosity and compassion that the film falls victim to sentimentality. The entire immigrant experience seems bathed in a nostalgic glow that is told in charming slice-of-life shots — the immigrant who breaks in rich men's shoes for a living or Sam bringing his grandchildren to sleep in the park on hot nights.

Their Jewish religion is given scant attention — on the other hand, it extols family values, a rare commodity in current films, and shows how close-knit families were affected by the popularity of cars, television and migration to the suburbs.

Thanksgiving and Fourth of July celebrations are frequently highlighted, and, though this movie probably won't set off any fireworks at the box office, families can be grateful for an endearing picture they can enjoy and discuss together.

The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Re-release marks movie's golden anniversary

NEW YORK (CNS) — The remarkable film in which Walt Disney tried to popularize classical music with the help of Mickey Mouse, "Fantasia" (Disney) has been re-released to mark its 50th anniversary.

The animated movie is actually in eight distinct parts, each a visual tribute to a work by such composers as Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky. Some tell a story, such as "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" by Dukas, in which an overeager Mickey Mouse dons his master's magical cap with disastrous results that teach him a lesson in patience.

Another segment uses striking abstract images to complement the musical Bach selection. At times the screen virtually

glows with pictures of shimmering, translucent beauty. All the pieces are performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra led by Leopold Stokowski.

Possibly the most captivating is the whimsical interpretation of Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours," featuring pirouetting ostriches, crafty crocodiles and a very ladylike hippo.

"Night on Bald Mountain," by Moussorgsky, the film's final number, is a stirring struggle between the profane and the sacred with an enchantingly spiritual moment depicting candle-bearing pilgrims silhouetted in procession through an evening forest to the strains of "Ave Maria," which certainly ends the film on an uplifting note.

"Fantasia" has been carefully and beautifully restored to its original condition for this re-release. The all-important soundtrack is glorious and the colors fairly pop off the screen in some scenes while in others they appear to gently float in soft, muted hues.

Some segments are more successful than others — some of the fantasy creatures are cute to a fault and at times the film seems overlong. And although young children's attention may wane in several segments, "Fantasia" is a unique effort suitable for the whole family.

The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences.



The Walt Disney Company Using one of his master's spells, sorcerer's apprentice Mickey Mouse gains control of the stars in the classic animated feature "Fantasia."