

Film updates tradition of crime melodramas

NEW YORK (CNS) — A tough old-time gangster movie, "Miller's Crossing" (Twentieth Century Fox) may be of interest to more than hard-boiled action fans.

Set in an unnamed metropolis in 1929, the story centers on Tom Reagan (Gabriel Byrne), a hood who knows all the answers even before his aging boss, Leo (Albert Finney), asks the questions.

For years Leo's gang has run everything in town from city hall to gambling and the protection rackets. But Leo's smooth operation comes unglued when, against Tom's advice, he forbids Caspar (Jon Polito), a rival gang leader, from rubbing out a small-time chiseler, Bernie (John Turturro).

Leo's decision is motivated more by his love for Bernie's sister Verna (Marcia Gay Harden) than the need to keep Caspar in his place. After Leo learns of Tom's sleeping with Verna, he throws him out of the mob and Tom winds up working for Caspar.

A bloody gang war breaks out with grafters and gangsters scrambling to be on the winning side. Through it all, Tom keeps his own counsel in pursuing an independent but dangerous course of action motivated by his own twisted sense of loyalty.

Written, produced and directed by the brothers Joel and Ethan Coen, the hard-boiled story is intelligently plotted with some interesting twists involving the criminal code of loyalty among thieves.

For those willing to take this walk on the wild side, there are some compensations. Though the world it depicts is not an inviting one, the intricate plot and the solid performances keep one's interest in how the falling out among thieves is going to be resolved.

In the end, the one mob beating the other proves nothing. The bloodshed has been meaningless, the future holds only more of the same and, in the last analysis, nobody wins.



Above, Verna (Marcia Gay Harden) loves Tom (Gabriel Byrne), but thinks he may have killed her brother, in the gangster drama *Miller's Crossing*. At right, John Turturro plays grifter Bernie Bernbaum.



This updating of a former tradition of crime melodrama is satisfying in its recreation of the period setting, nicely abetted by the somber, dark tones of the color photography.

The updating, however, also includes much graphic, special-effects violence made palatable only by the distancing effect of its stylized treatment. Some will find much more disturbing the movie's

effective use of menace and the human fear of pain.

Because of the movie's considerable violence and heavy atmosphere of menace, references to illicit sexual relationships and occasional profanity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.



Bernard Fallon/Paramount Pictures Dinky Bossetti (Winona Ryder) awaits the return of her town's local living legend in *Welcome Home, Roxy Carmichael*.

'Roxy' offers support for family values

NEW YORK (CNS) — A small town catches celebrity fever in "Welcome Home Roxy Carmichael" (Paramount).

Everyone in town is anticipating the return of Roxy, their one Hollywood celebrity, for a weekend ball and speculating as to whether or not she will try to resume her romance with Denton (Jeff Daniels), who is now the married father of two.

Most curious of all is Dinky (Winona Ryder), an alienated 15-year-old whose hostility has distanced her from her adopted parents, schoolmates and even a hopeful boyfriend (Thomas Wilson Brown).

Dinky identifies with Roxy's legendary rebelliousness, and when Denton tells her that he and Roxy secretly had a baby girl they gave up before Roxy took off for the bright lights, Dinky becomes convinced that Roxy is her mom.

Meanwhile, Denton's wife packs her bags rather than see her husband starry-eyed over a long-dead romance, and Dinky's parents are ready to ship their moody daughter off to a boarding school. In this climate, Roxy's arrival becomes a crucial event for Dinky and Denton.

Director Jim Abrahams has taken a basically frivolous story about a celebrity-mad town and turned it into a small but enjoyable film about human relationships.

Ryder is exceptionally good as the unhappy teenager who starts to find her way thanks to a caring guidance counselor and a boy who sees beyond her unkempt looks. Eventually, her insight allows Denton to better appreciate the people in his life too.

The movie's pace is unhurried and the humor gentle in the account of Roxy's return to dedicate the Roxy Carmichael Center for Cosmetology and Drama.

Amiably ambling through the town and its gossipy denizens, the film lightly mocks the petty vanities of citizens who scurry to outshine each other at the Roxy Ball. But the characters are not portrayed as mean-spirited; they have warmth and a homey charm that gives the picture a certain uncommon sweetness.

In fact, for a film that's supposed to be preoccupied with the irresistible glamour of the rich and famous, it's the family and basic human values that come out on top.

Because of a reference to an implied unmarried sexual relationship, minimal vulgar expressions and a flash of rear nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Comedy fails to tickle funny bone

NEW YORK (CNS) — Michael Caine stars as a magical bartender who can make your life so good you beg for mercy in "Mr. Destiny" (Touchstone).

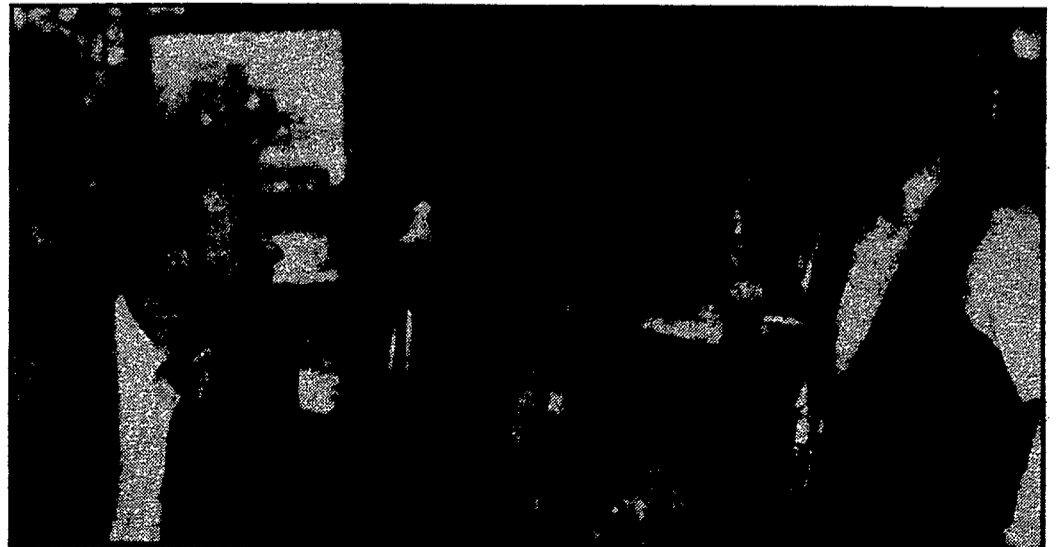
On his 35th birthday, Larry (Jim Belushi) laments how he lost a crucial high school baseball game and his life's been humdrum ever since. A sympathetic bartender (Caine) serves him a special concoction and — presto — the past is undone and suddenly Larry is a company president, owns a mansion and has married the prom queen.

It's great at first, but soon Larry misses his real wife (Linda Hamilton) and his best buddy (Jon Lovitz). Trouble is, when he's in his new position, they both despise him.

Clearly inspired by "It's A Wonderful Life," this comic version never takes off. The Belushi character is so white bread it doesn't seem to matter which life he ends up in.

The characters all have heart but they need more of a funny bone to keep viewers watching.

Because of minor stylized violence and a few vulgar expressions, 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.



Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, Inc. Disguised as an ordinary man, Mr. Destiny, (Michael Caine, right) gives Larry (James Belushi) a new lease on life.