

FEATURE

Mob movie offers absorbing character study

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently completed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each review includes USCC and Motion Picture Association of America ratings.

Donnie Brasco

Fact-based story about an undercover FBI agent (Johnny Depp) who infiltrates a New York mob family in the late 1970s by befriending an aging, low-level hood (Al Pacino), despite the agent's moral dilemmas over neglecting his family for several years, then betraying a man who treated him like a son. Director Mike Newell delivers an absorbing character study of a good guy nearly destroyed by his dedication to the job while never glamorizing the vicious brutality of the gangsters. Brief graphic violence, flash of nudity, intermittent profanity and much rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Private Parts

Vulgar comic treatment of career and personal life of trash talk radio host

Howard Stern (playing himself). Directed by Betty Thomas, the self-serving vehicle promotes Stern as a fearless iconoclast on the air but a faithful family man at home. Fleeting violence, benign view of recreational drug use, many crude sexual references, frequent nudity and much rough language. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Smilla's Sense of Snow

Convinced the death of a little Inuit boy in her Copenhagen apartment building was murder, a reclusive mathematician (Julia Ormand) is aided by a mysterious neighbor (Gabriel Byrne) in uncovering a fantastic conspiracy going back three decades that puts their lives in danger. Director Bille August creates a remarkable tale whose visuals are filled with mystery and echoes of a Native culture being exploited for profit involving a jarring mix of science fiction. Some sexual innuendo, some violence and intermittent rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.



Fox Pictures

Julia Ormand as Smilla Jaspersen in the mysterious "Smilla's Sense of Snow."

Booty Calls

Dully repetitive sex farce in which two men (Jamie Foxx and Tommy Davidson) overcome complications before bedding their respective dates (Vivica A. Fox and Tamala Jones). Directed by Jeff Pollack, the result is a nonstop exercise in witless sexual situations with blue humor. Exploitative sexual situations and constant rough language. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

The Daytrippers

When a happily married teacher

(Hope Davis) finds a love letter to her husband (Stanley Tucci), she spends the day with her concerned family (including mom Anne Meara, dad Pat McNamara and sister Parker Posey) driving around Manhattan searching for an explanation from her elusive husband. Adroitly mixing comedy and drama, writer-director Greg Mottola explores intimate and family relationships with realism and sympathy for the very human characters who flesh out the story. Some sexual innuendo, some profanity and occasional rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the MPAA.

Cardinal left moving 'gift'

The Gift of Peace, by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin. Loyola Press. (Chicago, 1997). 155 pp., \$17.95.

Reviewed by Msgr. Charles Dollen
Catholic News Service

A modern American bishop lives a very busy and public life, truly in a fishbowl. Through it all he must play many roles — apostle, teacher, administrator, financier and a man of God. And, to the sharpest of critics he must be a priest's priest.

The weeks leading up to the death in November of Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago threw this whole pattern into the public media and held it up in the spotlight for all to see. And how mightily he responded!

The Gift of Peace is his final testament to his people and to all of us. He wrote an intensely personal account of his life in the last three years, finishing it just 13 days before his death.

Three events highlighted those years: the false accusations against him of sexual misconduct; his first bout with cancer, diagnosed as "cured"; and the final determination of the aggressive cancer and his determination to terminate all extraordinary treatment of it.

He writes movingly of the false accusa-

tion, and the reader can feel his bewilderment over it. "How," he exclaims, "can you prove you didn't do something?" His critics were quick to demand his resignation; a legion of friends stood firmly behind him.

The first real intimation of his mortality came with the first bout of cancer. This threw his whole life into perspective. He finally realized how vitally important it was to live each day "in the light of eternity." At that time he finally decided to give the first hour of each day as quality time to be spent in prayer.



BOOK REVIEW

When it became apparent that death was close, he went from the "Why me, Lord?" to the acceptance of his condition as a grace from God. It was a transforming moment in his whole spiritual life.

He ends the book with the prayer of St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace ..."

This intensely personal book is well worth the time, and the reader will certainly share in the peace of the Lord with the cardinal.

Msgr. Dollen is book review editor of The Priest magazine.

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