

FEATURE

New festival shines light on movies' ethical values

By Lynne Weil
Catholic News Service

ROME — The works of Woody Allen, Kenneth Branagh and Spike Lee have more in common than meets the eye, according to the organizers of a new film festival.

Each recently has used his medium to go beyond mere entertainment to address essential human issues, making them eligible for the "Third Millennium International Festival of Spiritual Cinema."

A private initiative with state funding and the Vatican's blessing, the Nov. 28-Dec. 10 event brings together 37 feature-length movies from North America, Europe and Central Asia, plus several noted producers and directors. Organizers hope it will become an annual occasion of importance in the entertainment world.

The organizers presented the program Nov. 24 at the cafe where, a year before, they had thought the whole thing up.

Andrea Piersanti, chief editor of an Italian film magazine, teamed up with artistic director Claudio Siniscalchi to convince movie distributors, sponsors and the Italian government's Culture Ministry to back the plan with logistical and financial support. Officials of the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Vatican Film Archive helped select the entries and promote the event.

"Festivals always look at the aesthetic values of films, but rarely look at their ethical and moral values," Piersanti explained. "We wanted to recognize those works which pose deeper questions, to

present films of quality which show intellectual honesty."

Siniscalchi said the festival was not meant to include "only religious films, but films which offer a variety of ideas on spiritual questions."

So, for example, Allen's 1996 musical hit "Everyone Says I Love You" was selected for its "strong attention to human values and to moral dilemmas which many of us face," he said, while Lee's docu-drama "Get On the Bus" was to be included because it "shows the inner explorations of black Americans." Branagh's version of "Hamlet" was valued for "its modern presentation of classic themes."

Msgr. Enrique Planas Coma, who oversees the Vatican's film collection, noted that in the past, the Catholic Church was known for approving and disapproving films according to their content, "but these days, we are aware that it is better to construct than to destroy."

"A festival such as this one offers opportunities to reflect on serious things and to promote a dialogue between the church and the world," Msgr. Planas said.

The Vatican councils for culture and social communications arranged a three-day seminar on "The Cinema, Vehicle of Spirituality and of Culture" during the festival, assembling movie professionals, academics and church authorities.

Msgr. Planas said this was "a tangible sign" of the Vatican's support for the festival, "which we hope will be institutionalized over the years and grow and grow."



CNS/Disney

Robin Williams, as absent-minded professor Phillip Brainard, is the brains behind the new energy source "Flubber."

Films lack substance, plots

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

Alien Resurrection

Grim sci-fi sequel finds Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) revived aboard a spaceship and teamed with a mysterious stranger (Winona Ryder) to rid the vehicle of rampaging aliens. Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet's mildly suspenseful thriller uses the stale aliens-on-the-loose premise mainly for grotesque combinations of incubating monsters grafted onto deformed human body parts. Recurring gory violence,

some profanity and frequent rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Flubber

Weak remake of 1961's "The Absent-Minded Professor" has a distracted professor (Robin Williams) leaving his college president bride (Marcia Gay Harden) at the altar while inventing flying rubber to save their debt-ridden college. Director Les Mayfield flubs it with an excess of jokey special effects at the expense of story and characterization. Frequent slapstick violence and fleeting sexual innuendo. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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