Flicks

Movie Review: 'Broadway Danny Rose'

By Arthur J. Johnson

Woody Allen occupies a unique position as a filmmaking artist. He has been given the opportunity to learn how to make films as he experiments making them.

He began his career as a stand-up comic in the 1950's before making an unusual film debut: Allen took an existing Japanese spy flick, threw out its soundtrack and added his own madcap storyline and soundtrack. Retitling the film "What's Up, Tiger Lily?", Allen's peculiar film career had began.

Next, he wrote the screenplay for the memorable 60's Peter O'Toole-Peter Sellers sex farce "What's New, Pussycat?" Meanwhile, Allen penned and starred on Broadway in the comedy "Play It Again, Sam", whose hero gets encouragement from the ghost of screen icon Humphrey Bogart.

Soon it was time for Allen's film debut as writer/director and star in "Take The Money and Run" as a bumbling bank robber, followed by other wacky comedies such as "Bananas" (about a revolution in a banana republic). "Sleeper" (a Rip Van Winkle type awakens in the 20th century), and episodic comedic film adaption of Dr. Reuben's "Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About Sex But Were Afraid to Ask", "Love And Death", a parody of Russian literature, and the film version of his Broadway hit, "Play It Again, Sam".

Allen also began the practice of using an ensemble company of actors and technicians and even his live-in girlfriends such as Diane Keaton (recently replaced by Mia Farrow). In fact, Allen wrote a screenplay about his relationship with Miss Keaton, "Annie Hall", which became his breakthrough film, a film even non-members of the growing Allen cult took to their hearts. "Annie" earned Oscars for Miss Keaton, (Best Actress) and Allen (Best Director) and began Allen's progression from maker of wacky comedies to more realistic comedy-drama.

He then gave us "Manhattan"-a comedy drama about life among New York's wealthy classes filmed in sumptuous black and white and then the heavy, drama of "Interiors", about an upper class family in crisis. Allen returned again to semi-autobiography with "Stardust Memories", a Fellini-esque portrait of a famous director rejecting fame's intrusions upon his life. Recent films have included "A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy" and 1983's "Zelig", a masterpiece of editing of early 20th century newsreel footage with new footage about a chameleon-like man who has the ability to assume the physical features of anyone with whom he comes into contact.

Allen's films have received varying degrees of critical and box-office success, but he always follows a success or flop with another film and sometimes works on two films at one time, in between writing books and plays.

Allen's latest effort, "Broadway Danny Rose" is again photographed in black and white and combines elements of comedy and drama. Allen portrays Danny Rose of the title, a hard-working New York theatrical agent whose clients always leave him as soon as they achieve any measure of success.

Woody Allen, as Danny Rose, trying to reason with an irate Tina Vitale, played by (Mia Farrow).

His top acts include a one-legged tap-dancer and a one-arm juggler. Danny's most promising client of the moment is a has-been Italian crooner, played by Nick Apollo Forte, who, thanks to Danny's tireless efforts, is about to get another shot at the big time.

Problems arise when the crooner asks Danny to escort his girlfriend Tina (played by an almost unrecognizable Mia Farrow) to his big nightclub opening so that his wife won't recognize her as the other woman.

Unfortunately, Danny is mistaken for her real beau by Tina's neurotic Italian ex-boyfriend whose murderous brothers then seek to avenge their brother's honor. These thugs soon have Danny and Tina on the run, where Danny and Tina become acquainted and finally wrangle out of their predicament, and Danny finally makes an unexpected impression upon the hard-bitten Tina.

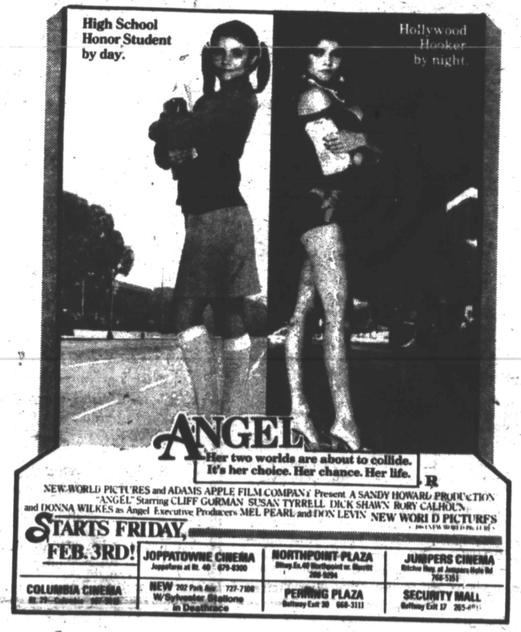
"Charming" best describes Allen's latest film. Danny is the eternal optimist, always boosting the spirits of others, giving his last dime to help a friend in a world full of cynics and users such as Tina.

He can talk his way out of any situation and inspire confidence where none exists. As Danny, Allen gives his best performance to date, avoiding his customary self-concious sides, and plays Danny as a real character, not a caricature

And Mia Farrow, who gained several pounds, padded herself and donned a blonde wig to play against her waif image of TV's "Peyton Place" and films such as "Rosemary's Baby" and "The Great Gatsby", gives a very fine and credible performance.

Forte is perfect as the crooner on his way up again and Allen has peopled all the scenes with unforgettable faces, the faces of real everyday people instead of the sleek tanned faces that usually populate Hollywood films.

"Broadway Danny Rose" offers a breath of fresh air to American film comedy just as "Terms of Endearment" did. It says that life is funny and sad and sometimes both at the same time. It is a very likeable film and in its understatement makes the most eloquent statements of all about human beings.



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Theater

'Hallelujah Boulevard'

...some good and some bad

By Ernest P. White, Jr.

"Hallelujah Boulevard" opened in mid-December at the Marvin Center on the campus of the George Washington University. From Feb. 11-25, the play will be done at the New Theatre of Washington, 721 11t St., NW, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Directed by Phillip Schrager, "Hallelujah Boulevard" is based on the gospel—scripturally and musically. Gospel-based musicals are big business; they create excitement and most often bring the audience to their feet by play's end. This, however, is not the case with "Hallelujah Boulevard;" the production is very slow getting started. After the opening number, "Genesis," it puts on the brakes and it isn't until "Come On Children," that we see any of that high energy that we saw in "Genesis."

Deborah Chaplin generates the same kind of call and response from the audience that is imperative in productions like this one is going to work. Because the play is based on scriptural accounts of many of the parables found in the Bible, it does have a sound foundation and the viewer doesn't have to wonder what's happening. That in itself is a plus.

Overall, Act II had a much higher energy level and the audience seemed to get more involved. Act II begins with a church setting, reminiscent of the pentecostal praise and testimony service. Melody Taylor, a regular performer at New Theatre, does an excellent rendition of "Safely to the Light."

In Act I her sensuous vocals on "Entreat Me Not to Leave You ," were outstanding.

The dancing of Sekethia Jackson and Kent Taylor on "Sweet Mary" was one of the finest moments in the entire evening. However, throughout the evening Kent Taylor established himself as the class dancer in this production. He was inspiring, and danced with conviction and technique not exhibited by his fellow dancers. He is a gifted, promising young dancer.

The ensemble's vocals were spotted at best. Some weren't sure of entros and there was a tendency to go flat as the evening went on. The choreography in general was adequate; however, again several members of the ensemble were obviously unprepared. It would be unfair to review this production without mentioning the conditions under which the performers worked. The auditorium was extremely cold and had to have affected the vocalists and dancers. Most in the audience sat throughout in their coats.

Overall, the production shows promise and New Theatre is to be commended for providing an opportunity for young artists to exhibit their talents. It is worth seeing if for no other reason thao Kent Taylor's dancing. Rickey Payton's music arrangements are effective.

Ken Daughtry and Rhonda Akanke star in The Takoma Theatre and The Takoma Players production of "Once In A Wife Time" thru Feb. 26, 6833 4th St., N.W., D.C.

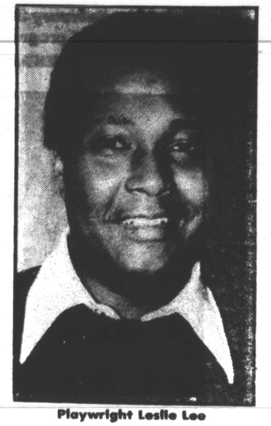
'Colored People's Time' by Negro Ensemble Company at Bowie

The Negro Ensemble Company, America's foremost black theatre, will present its critically acclaimed production of "Colored People's Time" on Feb. 15, 16, 17, 1984 at Martin Luther King, Jr. Auditorium under the sponsorship of Bowie State College as a special theatrical event celebrating 1984 Black History Month. Curtain times for the performances are Feb. 15, Black-tie Champagne Reception)—7:00 p.m. Feb. 16 & 17 — 8:00 p.m.

Leslie Lee's comedy-drama with music offers a cavalcade of black American history that spans an entire century, from the pre-Civil War years to the roots of the modern civil rights movement. When the play opened in New York, critics praised Lee's skill in dramatizing key historical episodes by viewing them through the eyes of ordinary people whose lives are profoundly changed by the great events and powerful leaders of their times.

An outstanding bi-racial cast under the direction of Horacena J. Taylor will perform a total of more than two dozen roles in the play. Although the characters are fictional, the playwright says they represent all the "unsung heroes of black American history," people whose daily lives were acts of courage and heroism in themselves.

Each scene in the play introduces new characters and a different period in history, with songs and dances adding an extra touch of authentic atmosphere. As New Yorker magazine critic Edith Oliver noted, "These scenes present a vivid composite picture of Negro life over an important century. Mr. Lee is a fine writer."



Playwright Leslie Lee

Lee's earlier stage hit, "The First Breeze of Summer," was produced by the Negro Ensemble Company in 1975 and moved to Broadway the following

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