

reel reviews

★ ★ ★ ½ **Radio Days**

Oaks Six

Woody Allen's latest feature is a slap-dash, sloppy love letter written to his childhood and to an America when times seemed simpler and radio was the voice of pop culture.

Its clearly autobiographical stories are recounted in a loose, episodic structure that focuses on two main areas.

First, we see the basically untroubled world of a young, red-haired boy meant to be seen as Allen's alter ego. He's at the center of a milieu including parents, grandparents, aunt, uncles, noisy neighbors, burglars, suitors, etc., etc.

Their "poor, but happy, but *definitely* poor" lives are set in gentle contrast to the glamorous and exotic social scene of the famous radio stars they listen to on the Victrola.

Tying it all together is the

film's musical score. It brims with peppy songs by such pop stars as Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and Carmen Miranda, as well as glorious big band classics like "Night and Day" and "Begin the Beguine."

Another constant is the voice-over narration of Allen. In effect, it keeps the events taking place at a safe, rose-colored distance by reminding us that this all happened long, long ago.

Fond memories are not the time for deep introspection, and Allen seems to recognize this early on when he says, "Forgive me if I tend to romanticize the past."

That's easy to do, for *Radio Days* is an endearing trifle bursting with memorable characters and funny stories.

The cast is impeccable, which isn't surprising — Allen manages to fill even minor roles with the likes of Jeff Daniels and Diane

Keaton.

Given the tone of this project, it's also natural that the editing of Susan E. Morse — which was so masterful in *Hannah and Her Sisters* — is more casual and unstudied.

This film is the celluloid equivalent of leafing through Allen's family photo album and having him tell us the stories behind the pictures we see. People appear and reappear randomly, sometimes changed dramatically, but more often than not remaining comfortably the same. When he runs out of snapshots, the film is over.

Like the photographs in this imaginary album, the people and stories Allen relates in *Radio Days* are vivid and appealing — yet never more than two-dimensional. But it *is* powerful nostalgia, even if it's not quite as powerful filmmaking.

By Michael Giltz