

Unbearable Lightness . . . rises above the rest; *Biloxi Blues* is quite a beaut

★★★★ The Unbearable Lightness Of Being *Plaza*

Once in a great while, a movie comes along that makes you think, that challenges the way you view the world. But rarer still is a movie that thinks for itself, a movie that rushes along on a whirl of ideas, heedless of the audience it leaves breathless and far, far behind. *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being* is such a movie.

The story concerns Tomas (Daniel Day Lewis), a philandering physician — a brain surgeon to be exact — who plays erotic mind games with the alluring Sabina (Lena Olin), a rising artist. They have an enigmatic relationship, appearing to be friends who make love rather than lovers who happen to be good friends, but it is a satisfying one.



The two are happily ensconced in the burgeoning cultural life of Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, a time when the totalitarian government began to experiment with "socialism with a human face."

Complications arise when Tomas flirts with a naive young woman in a small town — only to find her pop up on his doorstep a few days later. He takes the woman, named Tereza (Juliette Binoche), into his home, though continuing to dally with Sabina.

Up to this point, the film is bracingly adult and almost brazenly self-reflective. The three of them lie together in various couplings, discussing their situation — analyzing, criticizing and philosophizing in delightfully abstract terms. And then their world explodes.

The liberalization of their country attracted the wrath of the

Soviet Union, which invaded Czechoslovakia with tanks and troops. In a harrowing sequence, director Philip Kaufman mixes a montage of black and white scenes of the invaders with glimpses of our protagonists. Gripping shots of protesting Czechs seem to be actual newsreel footage, until we see Tomas or Tereza in the corner of the screen.

The result is much more than a "you are there" immediacy, for Kaufman makes us painfully feel the loss of this country, this vibrant culture that will never be the same. When the scenes are over, we are drained and at a loss. What ever will Tomas and Tereza and Sabina do? Well, they leave.

There is more, much more. We follow them as they go to Switzerland and observe the ensuing entanglements. Then Sabina heads for America, while Tomas and Tereza go back to Czechoslovakia, though the land they left is gone

forever.

Kaufman's vision is epic in scope, though only in the sense that any movie these days that is over two hours and doesn't end in a shootout is epic. He is abetted at every step by the marvelous acting of the three leads and the wonderful screenplay (which Kaufman co-adapted from Milan Kundera's acclaimed novel). One can almost feel him relishing the slow, leisurely pace he has set for himself.

That pace allows Kaufman to achieve what *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being* does best: show the careful sparring, the quiet jostling for advantage that occurs between adult human beings.

Moment after indelible moment brings this home — the playful reunion between Tomas and Sabina after years of being apart, a reunion where they talk banally and he even makes a pretense for the door before they rush madly for the bed; the tragic time when Tereza tries to understand Tomas' constant indiscretions by sleeping with a stranger, an occurrence that is so sad and real that it is more painful than any rape or prostitution I have ever seen in the movies; the careful dance between a wary Tomas and an unconcerned city official who wants him to sign a public confession.

There is more, much more, for Kaufman has followed the gloriously vibrant *The Right Stuff* with a thoughtful, daring piece. His ambition informs every frame and *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being* meanders from its highly charged beginning to a philosophical, musing end with a sure-footed, casual ease.

By Michael Giltz

★★★ **Biloxi Blues**
Oaks Four West

Neil Simon is to Broadway as Steven Spielberg is to the movies. Simon has been remarkably prolific over the years, with each season invariably bringing with it a new comedy along with one or two successful holdovers. He is certainly the most successful playwright of our time. Also like Spielberg, Simon has been a long time in getting critical recognition — perhaps

correctly so.

That is changing now. With a trilogy of semi-autobiographical works (*Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Broadway Bound*), he has gained critical plaudits as well as some of the biggest commercial success of his very commercial career.

But you wouldn't have known it from his movies. Simon has not been treated well as of late by the cinema, and even *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, which had been heralded as the beginning of his mature masterpiece, came across as hokey and unsatisfying.

Now that is changing as well. Mike Nichols, who has collaborated with Simon on four plays, has finally helmed one onscreen, and his thoughtful attention to detail shows. With the added presence of Matthew Broderick, in the Simon-based role of Eugene that he originated on Broadway, *Biloxi Blues* sparkles.

The film follows Eugene as he is drafted into the Army and endures boot camp in 1945. The usual escapades follow: Christopher Walken plays a low-key sergeant with a delightfully twisted sense of logic, and he rides hard over the usual assortment of soldiers, including a tough-talking dummy, an Irishman and an all-American buddy.

But it works. Simon's script is hilarious and filled with witty set pieces, especially the scene where Eugene loses his virginity to a prostitute. *Biloxi Blues* also benefits from the very original character of Epstein, a homosexual Jew that Eugene feels friendly toward but never really defends against the others' racial jibes. Epstein gives this otherwise Army regulation, standard-issue story a good amount of depth, and Corey Parker delivers a bristling but poignant performance.

Biloxi Blues is a study in modesty. It never achieves greatness because it never attempts to; the filmmakers set their goals carefully and achieved them. Its sturdy pleasures — a witty script, a strong ensemble and sensitive direction — will carry this movie far into the future long after other, flashier films have become outdated and worn.

By Michael Giltz