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Michael Giltz

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DVDs: A Perfect Movie-Going Experience

Posted March 17, 2008 | 03:35 PM (EST)

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Let's face it. Sometimes you're just not in the mood to see a five-hour documentary on the Holocaust. Or maybe you're feeling grumpy and you harrumph your way through an animated musical. (Dancing spoons? Bah!) And once in a while, you see the right movie at the right time with the right audience (and maybe even the right weather) and the experience is just...perfect.

It happened to me when I stumbled into Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose Of Cairo* in a near-empty movie theater and didn't know the first thing about the plot. It happened again when I saw Jane Campion's *The Piano* at an early screening before all the hype with a friend who was just as enthralled as I.

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And it happened again with Ang Lee's *The Ice Storm* (\$39.95; Criterion). I was already a big fan of Lee, who was in the midst of a near-perfect run of films, starting with the crowd-pleasing comedy *The Wedding Banquet*, the mature and far more accomplished *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the marvelous *Sense & Sensibility* and then this pitch perfect

Seventies drama with a young Tobey Maguire on the verge of stardom.

Don't ask me how I missed one of the early screenings or its premiere at the New York Film Festival. But I did. So here it was, a cold and rainy night in New York City, probably in October or November of 1987. I'd just seen an awful movie at a screening I did make and should have skipped. Nothing puts you in a bad mood faster than a movie that makes you feel you've wasted your time. I was stalking up Broadway towards my home when I spotted *The Ice Storm* playing at Lincoln Plaza. I checked the time and it was just about to begin.



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Often, seeing a bad movie can make you stay away from films altogether for a few days or even a week or more. But I just knew *The Ice Storm* would at least be good, given Lee and the cast of Kevin Kline, Sigourney Weaver, Christina Ricci and Joan Allen. So I bought a ticket, went in, found maybe seven or eight people in the theater scattered about in their own private worlds and took a seat.

As you may have guessed, I was mesmerized. A brilliant adaptation of the Rick Moody novel, the movie would have been great under any circumstances. But my mood, the night, and the near-empty theater just made it better. And who was this kid Tobey Maguire? I vaguely remembered him from *This Boy's Life* but I would never forget him again. Everyone sat in silence as the credits rolled and then we bundled up and stepped outside into the rain, each of us alone, wet, tired...and happy.

Also out this week: Jerry Seinfeld's modestly successful hybrid of an animated flick, *Bee Movie* (\$29.98; DreamWorks); *Battlestar: Galactica Season Three* (\$59.98; Universal) and yes, watching key episodes again does remind you this was a near disastrous collapse creatively but loads of extras and the talented cast make you hopeful they can pull it together for the fourth and final season starting April 4; the Oscar-winning Coen brothers triumph *No Country For Old Men* (\$29.99; Miramax), which is not all that but is still a respectable Best Picture winner; *South Park: Imaginationland* (\$19.99; Paramount) an extended version of the three part cliffhanger that's very, very funny and makes you wonder yet again why they haven't made another feature film; *Atonement* (\$29.98; Universal), the nicely made period drama that finally - finally! - has turned the charming James McAvoy into a leading man; *Tongues Untied* (\$29.99; Frameline), the groundbreaking documentary about the dual blasts of prejudice that black gay men must endure; Will Smith may not have done himself any favors with his stiff portrayal of a black gay con artist in *Six Degrees of Separation* but he later became the biggest movie star in the world and holds the screen handily in *I Am Legend* (\$34.99; Warner Bros.) until it slowly deflates at the end; *Pucca: Ninjas Love Noodles* (\$14.99; Shout), one of several Pucca compilations containing 13 episodes that combine *The Powerpuff Girls* with a romance manga in a truly offbeat, cross-cultural jumble; director Tony Kaye's hard to watch and harder to forget abortion rights epic *Lake Of Fire* (\$27.98; ThinkFilm); Amy Adams' breakthrough *Enchanted* (\$29.99; Disney), a gentle spoof of animated musicals; *101 Dalmatians* (\$29.99; Disney), the solid, second-tier animated flick with a fun villain and one enduring song; the absorbing "missing mother" UK miniseries *Five Days* (\$29.98; HBO); Al Pacino acting up a storm in his Seventies salad day vehicles *Bobby Deerfield* (\$19.94; Columbia/Warner Bros.) and the legal potboiler *...And Justice For All* (\$19.94; Columbia) ("No, YOU'RE out of order!"); Javier Bardem's well-intentioned but stillborn adaptation of *Love In The Time Of Cholera* (\$27.98; New Line); *Click Clack Moo Cows That Type* (\$14.95; Scholastic/New Video), the latest in gently illustrated classic stories (eight in all on this disc) narrated with verve by Randy Travis, Helen Hunt, Tim Curry and others; *Bachelor Party 2: The Last Temptation* (\$26.98; Fox), the not-a-moment-too-soon 2008 straight to DVD sequel to the Tom Hanks comedy released 24 years ago; and for horror buffs who can't wait till Halloween and *Saw XVIII* (or whatever), there's the creepy collection *8 Films To Die For After Dark Horrorfest* (\$159.84; LionsGate), available as a boxed set or as individual titles like *Crazy Eights* (\$19.98; LionsGate), which combines the nostalgia of a *Big Chill*-like reunion with...murder!

So do you have a perfect movie-going experience, some combination of the people you were with, the setting (maybe a drive-in?), your mood and the movie that created an ideal moment?

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My wife states, proudly, that I'm bi-fliktual, that's why "The Jane Austen Book Club" just blew me away. I think I'm in love with Emily Blunt, because "The Devil Wears Prada" is a repeat watch, and "Across the Universe", except for the acting, which was good, not great, should have won every other Oscar on the board. Julie Taymor! Julie Taymor!

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The best DVDs I have seen this week are:

"Sunshine" 2007 Science fiction with Cillian Murphy; great audio and visual affects; good story and plot twists.

"Blue State" 2008 Romantic Comedy with heavy political overtones stars Anna Paquin and Breckin Meyer. I liked this one well enough to watch it over again and enjoyed the ending.

I didn't think that much of No Country for old Men; too much pointless killing and real enough to scare the crap out of you. It's always fun to watch and listen to Tommy Lee Jones.

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