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Robert DiMatteo

In Movie Theaters

SWITCHING CHANNELS (PG)
This remake of "His Girl Friday" — the Rosalind Russell/Cary Grant screwball comedy that was itself a remake of the great newspaper comedy "The Front Page" — has the thankless task of attempting to measure up to a classic. The better one knows "Friday," the more disappointed one is likely to be by this picture, which updates the story to the era of TV journalism. It's harmless and moderately enjoyable, though.

Kathleen Turner stars as an ace Chicago anchorwoman who decides to

ditch her high-pressure job working for a slave driver of an ex-husband (Burt Reynolds); she's all too happy to leap into the arms of a fatuous but good-looking millionaire (Christopher Reeve). Reynolds and Turner have one of those can't-live-apart/can't-live-together relationships that are almost the romantic ideal of Hollywood comedies, so it's only a matter of time before he tricks her into postponing her wedding — ostensibly to finish reporting one last sensational case.

Reynolds is livelier here than he's been in years, and Reeve — mocking his pretty-boy image — is surprising-

ly funny. The game supporting cast includes Henry Gibson as a Houdini-aping convict slated for the electric chair, and, in a few inspired moments, Ned Beatty plays a corrupt gubernatorial candidate with a ravenous appetite. Some of the slapstick and machine-gun-fire repartee is heavy-handed — one sign that the movie lacks a sure, unifying comic rhythm and tone. A lot of this film just gets by, but it does get by. **GRADE: ★★½**

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING (R) This three-hour amatory epic by the risk-taking director Philip Kaufman ("The Right Stuff") intertwines love, sex and politics. Its source material is Milan Kundera's playfully obsessive novel about Tomas, a womanizing Czech brain surgeon who is torn between the dualities of commitment and freedom, love and sex, marriage and polygamy.

The setting is late-'80s Prague, the period when Czech society blossomed in open defiance of Soviet influence

only to endure the repressive measures brought on by the subsequent Soviet invasion. All the while, Tomas' dichotomous nature is embodied by two women — his faithful photographer wife Tereza (Juliette Binoche) and his free-spirited painter mistress Sabina (Lena Olin).

The book's triangular romance is filtered through Kundera's savory intellectual digressions — Nietzsche's idea of eternal return, an analysis of kitsch and so on. The movie, scripted by Jean-Claude Carriere and Kaufman, takes a necessarily more linear approach; and, by casting Daniel Day-Lewis ("My Beautiful Laundrette") as Tomas, it centers on a more boyish Casanova. Happily, the film achieves its own independent life, becoming as delicately thoughtful and poetic an American movie as we've had in a long time.

The trio of lead performances is a quiet marvel. Day-Lewis makes Tomas bright-eyed and avid. As Sabina, Lena Olin is a ravishingly saucy femme fatale in a black bowler hat; in contrast, Juliette Binoche's Tereza is a lovely gamine with doelike pathos.

GRADE: ★★½

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