

# the HERALD Entertainment

## Disney's Oliver is good company

Dickens and Disney seemed a nightmare combination to me, an orgy of sentimentality and pathos just waiting to wash over a captive audience.

Fortunately, I was wrong (aren't I always?). and Oliver and Company is a delightful little film, just perfect for the holidays and those ever present children.

The story is vaguely based on Oliver Twist (which I read many, many years ago and have since tried to obliterate from my mind). Oliver is a kitten without a home in New York City in the mean, lean, eighties. He is quickly recruited by the Artful Dodger, a wire-haired Terrier and joins Fagin's gang, a crew of cunning but loving dogs. Fagin is a caring master, but a very poor one who is in debt to the nasty loan shark, Mr. Sykes.

Oliver ends up in a happy, rich home, and Mr. Sykes is knocked off in an unusually black scene for a Disney cartoon. (It is not unsuitable for kids though.) The ending is not nearly as sappy as it could have been, and both children who accompanied me loved the film from

### AT THE MOVIES

beginning to end. Billy Joel is the voice of the Artful Dodger, and sings a couple of songs, as well. Cheech Marin provides a lot of the laughs as Tito, a crazy Mexican Chihuahua with tremendous nerve and bravado. Better Midler is perfect as the voice of Georgette, a pampered poodle who loathes Oliver and most other living creatures. Dom DeLuise, Richard Mulligan, and Roscoe Lee Browne provide some of the other voices. There are many songs in the movie, although none were memorable; but then I don't much like pop.

Oliver and Company is a fast-moving, tightly directed cartoon, with lots of laughs and some slightly scary moments. Disney for the eighties is a little more hip, a little darker, and ultimately more believable. You won't go into a sugar coma watching this film - which is good, considering all the junk one consumes over the holidays.

## Douglas lets the chips fall

A larger-than-life ego being very much a vital part of any actor's equipment, it should come as no surprise when that ego is manifest in an actor's account of his own life.

The Ragman's Son, An Autobiography by Kirk Douglas (Simon and Schuster, 310 pages, illustrated, \$29.95) is that actor's candid story of his own larger-than-life career.

Douglas became a movie star long before the word "superstar" was even coined, let alone devalued by too frequent and unwarranted minting. For four decades, his name above the title existence made his name and face familiar over much of the world.

Now, at age 71, he sets down in his own lucid style the ups and downs of that life, unrefined by the gloss of any slick professional collaborator, neither "authorized" nor "unauthorized," but decidedly undiluted.

Not surprisingly, the tone of the book is much like the Douglas personality on the screen - a little pugnacious, not always altogether likable, yet projecting a strength and determination that tend to win you over.

The humble beginnings are familiar enough. His parents, Herschel and Bryna Danielovitch, were penniless Russian-Jewish immigrants who settled in Amsterdam, N.Y. They were too busy surviving to pay much heed to the daydreams of an only son (among six female siblings) who wanted to be an actor.

That he succeeded, far beyond even his own dreams, is testimony to that determination in the character of Issur Danielovitch, who became Kirk Douglas.

He was 23 and working in a summer theatre when he changed his name, thus leaving himself open to anti-Semitic remarks, made casually in his presence by those who didn't know he was Jewish. It was a rankling phenomenon Douglas was to encounter all his life.

His achievements as a movie star (and producer) have been considerable, and not alone in terms of box office success. Among his 70-odd movies have been Champion, Lust For Life, Paths of Glory, Spartacus, The Bad and The Beautiful, Detective Story, Seven Days in May, Ace In The Hole and (most recently) Tough Guys.

At least some of them were noteworthy - both to Douglas and to movie-goers - for reasons that deserve to be recalled.

### Book Review by Alex Barris

In Spartacus, which he put together as well as starred in, Douglas made the bold move of hiring Dalton Trumbo as writer and giving him screen credit. Trumbo, one of the famous "Hollywood Ten" who served time in prison for refusing to co-operate with the McCarthy-era hunt, had resumed his screenwriting career, but under pseudonyms. Douglas was the first to defy the blacklist and hire Trumbo openly.

Paths of Glory, a film about corruption and incompetence in the French Army during the First World War, is regarded today as a classic anti-war film.

But those films were directed by a young Stanley Kubrick, and Douglas is quite outspoken in his appraisal of Kubrick, both as a director (good) and a human being (not so good).

Over the years, Douglas again and again demonstrated his independence, his courage in tackling unpopular subjects, his willingness to take gambles that resulted in films that would not, in the hands of studio moguls, have been as honest.

Douglas is quite candid in discussing the people he has dealt with. The book includes his evaluation of such icons as John Wayne, Eliz Kazan, Raoul Walsh and Robert Mitchum. He is equally open in references to his romantic involvements (both in and out of wedlock) with such people as Joan Crawford, Rita Hayworth, Gene Tierney and Pier Angeli.

Douglas the iconoclast has no patience with the "auteur" theory, which maintains that a film is the "creation" of the director and that such elements as writing and acting are far less important. To bolster his view, he tells of the making of Lonely Are The Brave, one of his favorite films. The young director, David Miller, was called away. Rather than delay production, Douglas made Edward Lewis, his producing

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Aaron Weiss may be Canada's youngest sports entrepreneur. The 15-year-old Toronto youth is putting together a series of 26 one-hour TV wrestling shows. Weiss has just negotiated a distribution agreement with Raymond International.

Weiss convinced the International Championship Wrestling organization of the U.S. to allow him to use some of its wrestlers. The TV series, being shot at live matches, is a mix of action and features. The first two shows, shot at an ICW match in Brampton, Ont., have been completed.

The young businessman, who has been called the "teen wrestling guru," has "an uncanny sensitivity to the right people," said Bruce Raymond, president of Raymond International. "He is working with first-class production people. He knows his subject matter and hires experts for the production end."

Weiss, who has served as a wrestling commentator for CITY-TV in Toronto and on cable TV shows, became a wrestling fan at the age of 12. He has turned his interest in wrestling into a profession.

He is serving as producer, host, ringside commentator and interviewer for the 26 ICW shows.

"It's very hard to get into something like this," said Weiss, "especially when you have no connections. You have to show your intelligence and overcome initial reluctance about your age. It's a very tough, cut-throat business, but age means nothing. It depends on

partner, the interim director. Afterwards, he asked Lewis if he had been nervous. Said Lewis: "When you have a great script, excellent actors, a good cameraman and no special effects, the director can go home."

Hungry for Broadway success, long after achieving Hollywood fame, he returned to the stage in One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. It was a failure, but he spent the next decade trying to turn it into a movie. In the end, it was his oldest son, Michael, who produced the highly successful movie - and by then Kirk was too old for the leading role, which went to Jack Nicholson.

Despite this and other disappointments, it is an air of boundless optimism that permeates the book. No challenge ever seemed too great for Douglas, no goal too distant to go for. One chapter begins: "I was exhilarated. I had crossed the Atlantic. You almost expect the next line to announce that he had done it on foot."

If there is a letdown in the book, it comes in the last quarter, a section devoted to Douglas' many overseas trips as goodwill ambassador on behalf of the US government. Admirable though these journeys may have been, they don't offer the drama of the actor's struggles not only to rise to prominence, but to gain and keep control of his own film-making career.

Despite this late threat to its overall dramatic effectiveness, The Ragman's Son is more than a cut above the conventional Hollywood autobiography - at least in part because of Kirk Douglas' willingness to let the chips fall.

-Alex Barris is the author of several books on films and TV.

Entertainment  
Bob Spence  
Thomson News Service

background and street smarts..." Among the wrestlers featured in the series are Jumping Joe Savoldi, Sensational Vic Steamboat and Tony "Mr. USA" Atlas.

Raymond will distribute the shows to TV stations across Canada and elsewhere. The ICW will receive a portion of the proceeds.

The TV series is to make its debut in the spring.

A CBC-TV one-hour special goes beyond the myths to explore the sexual needs of senior citizens.

The Best Years presents a forum, taped at Seneca College in Toronto, that examines intimacy, sexuality and aging.

The special airs Jan. 8.

Prince Charles doesn't think too much of modern British architecture. He made some sharply critical statements in a TV documentary that was aired in Britain last month. Now, he is offering his views in a book, A View of Britain: A Personal View of Architecture, which will be released in Britain in March.

The book, largely based on the documentary, will include additional material in which the Prince of Wales "will expand and develop his views," said a spokesman for Doubleday Canada. Doubleday will publish the book here next year.

"His Royal Highness's forthright statements about modern architecture and contemporary urban planning have struck a cord with hundreds of thousands of people," said John Pearce, editor-in-chief for Doubleday Canada.

Many Canadians will have to stay up until the wee hours of the morning if they want to watch Canada defend its World Junior Hockey Championship.

The 1989 tournament is being held in Anchorage, Alaska. The time zone difference (Alaska is four hours behind Ontario) means residents of central and eastern Canada will have to forgo some sleep if they want

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Canada's games against the U.S.A. (Dec. 29) Czechoslovakia (Jan. 1) and the U.S.S.R. (Jan. 4) will all be televised live by CBC-TV - but they start at 11:30 p.m. eastern time.

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