

Weekender Entertainment



The Color Purple: Another Spielberg hit

By IAN BAILEY
MARKVILLE

THE COLOR PURPLE: Since it was released in December, a lot of people have been seeing the color red over Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*.

Those who loved the book — essentially the story of 40 years in the life of a black woman in southern U.S. — have condemned Spielberg's abbreviation of the novel.

Black men in America have attacked the film for presenting a stereotype of them as oppressive brutes in their relationships with black women.

Even Spielberg's professional colleagues in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences took a kick at his work on the film by nominating it for 11 Oscars, including Best Picture. However, they didn't nominate Spielberg for Best Director in a bizarre snub that makes as much sense as praising a good novel for its characters, style and editing, but ignoring its writer.

The pleasures and problems with *The Color Purple* are representative of everything that Spielberg is as a filmmaker. His rich, exuberant cinematic style, which has been a strong feature of such films as the Indiana Jones epics, *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, often seems at odds with the story that screenwriter Menno Meyjes is adapting from Walker's novel.

That story spans 40 years in a small Georgia town — a large slice out of the life of a woman Celie (Whoopi Goldberg) who is oppressed by two men.

The first is her father who in turn fathers her two children and then sells her to the second male figure, her husband, Albert (Danny Glover from *Witness*).

Through decades of beatings and abuse by Albert and the dramas played out in a number of characters around her, Celie is sustained only by letters she writes to God, the promise that

she will someday be reunited with her missing children and her sister, and an intense relationship with her husband's mistress — a blues singer named Shug Avery (Margaret Avery).

This is a grim tale whose moments of hope and humor arise not from cinematic technique but from the characters who are played to perfection by the flawless cast. Although this is Celie's story and although she is portrayed with detail by Goldberg (my bet for the Best Actress Oscar, although one has to wonder about the value of an award from an organization that would slight Spielberg like this), *The Color Purple* is also about the lives of a number of characters around her, all of whom are played vividly.

Aside from the objections about the way that men are portrayed here (After all that perspective exists in the novel that serves as the basis of this film), the most striking peculiarity in the movie is the way Spielberg seems to over-dress the essential drama with his skilled cinematic style.

Granted, the way he cleverly cuts his scenes together and sweeps his camera over the action adds a light, flowing touch to the engrossing morass of a plot.

But combined with the rich photography of cinematographer Allen (E.T.) Daviau and the lush musical score by Quincy Jones (who initiated the project and served as one of the film's four producers), it gives the film a warm, hypnotic grandeur that's misplaced when warmth and appeal are provided by the humanity of the characters.

However, this flaw only arises when you look closely at the film. If you haven't read the book, and therefore have nothing to compare Spielberg's work to, you'll likely enjoy the film for its exuberant spirit, humor and emotion.

Spielberg, who seems to have retreated to more producing than directing in recent years (with



Whoopi Goldberg stars as Celie, who rises above years of mistreatment, sustained by a close bond with her absent sister and awakened by a lusty blues singer with a thirst for life in the Stephen Spielberg film, *The Color Purple*. The film is currently showing at Markville Cinema.

such results as *Gremlins*, *Back to the Future*, *Young Sherlock Holmes* and the forthcoming Tom Hanks comedy, *The Money Pit*) proves here that he's a master with the film medium though one can't help but hope that he will find future projects more suited to a flamboyance he seems unable to tone down. (PG)

MARKVILLE****
DOWN AND OUT IN BEVERLY HILLS: The lives of a neurotic Beverly Hills family are disrupted with amusing results when they take in a bum who tries to drown himself in their pool. Good performances by Richard Dreyfuss and Bette Midler in this amusing and adroit satire by Paul Mazurs-

ky, the director of *Moscow on the Hudson*. (AA: Coarse Language)***

THE JEWEL OF THE NILE: A flat and tedious sequel to the perky 1984 adventure *Romancing the Stone* that has little going for it except the charisma of stars Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas. (PG: Swearing)**

101 DALMATIANS: A re-release of Walt Disney's 1961 animated film about two dalmatians who try to save their pups from certain death. Weekend afternoon matinees only. (F)

YOUNGBLOOD: A highly melodramatic film about an aspiring junior hockey player (Rob Lowe) who comes to the dubious conclu-

sion that his athletic skills are useless in the game unless he can learn to fight as well. Slick, sick entertainment redeemed along the way by some good performances, particularly Lowe as the taciturn player. Markham's Steve Thomas, now a member of the Toronto Maple Leafs, has a small part in the movie. (AA)

****THORNHILL SQUARE F/X:** So how does a film special effects expert get even with government agents who set him up and try to kill him? Why, he just uses special effects gadgets to fight back. That's the plot and point of this engaging thriller whose only real failing is that it's never quite as tricky as you might expect it to be. At least it features a good performance from Australian actor Bryan Brown as the slightly crazy technician. (PG)***

MURPHY'S ROMANCE: A subdued comedic drama that's as soft, sweet and unfulfilling as a mouthful of marshmallows. The fact that it's watchable comes from the serviceable performances of stars Sally Field as a plucky divorcee, Lance Kerwin as her shiftless husband and, especially, James Garner (who has been nominated for a Best Actor Oscar) as a smalltown eccentric who falls in love with Field. The problem is that the filmmakers have smoothed out the rough edges on all the characters. At least the world-weary, easygoing Garner adds a welcome touch of cynicism to this goopy brew. (AA)

**** OUT OF AFRICA:** Robert Redford plays Denys Finch Hatton, a British hunter in Kenya in 1914, who fell in love with Karen Blixen (Meryl Streep), a Danish woman who managed a coffee plantation for 20 years and later wrote about Africa under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen. This majestic epic from director Sydney (Tootsie) Pollack moves slowly at times but it's an intriguing drama where length means depth instead of tedium. (PG)****

Sketch uses Stouffville as backdrop



Martin Short (left) had co-workers and onlookers in hysterics back on Labor Day when he filmed part of his first comedy special at Musselman's Lake. Here, the performer hams it up in fine Jerry Lewis fashion with wife and co-star Nancy Dolman, child actor Keram

Malicki-Sanchez and Gord Hamilton of the 21st Century Centre, Glendale Beach. The program airs on the CBC Television Network Thursday, March 13 at 9 p.m.

— Chris Shanahan

By CHRIS SHANAHAN
Staff Reporter

Television viewers can be sure that one upcoming CBC comedy special won't be 'short' on laughs.

Canadian humorist Martin Short brings his collection of crazy characters to the screen in a special that's to be broadcast Thursday, March 13 at 9 p.m.

And Whitechurch-Stouffville residents will probably recognize some of the scenery in a sketch entitled *Tender Fella*.

The Oscar-winning movie *Tender Mercies* was one of Short's targets when he filmed at Musselman's Lake back on Sept. 2 of 1985.

His production crew transformed the old Sun Valley Store into a Texas motel and gas bar for that Labor Day shoot.

Also included in the skit is Jim Irving, a former Stouffville Tribune reporter who has appeared in a variety of film projects.

The comedy special is Short's first, but the veteran of both the SCTV and *Saturday Night Live* television shows is obviously at home on the small screen. In part of *The Martin Short Comedy Special*, he's supported by past TV colleagues John Candy, Eugene Levy, Dave Thomas and Christopher Guest.

A production spokesman said the program was influenced in part by SCTV, *Saturday Night Live* and even the *David Letterman Show*. It's already been aired on a pay-television service in the United States.

Short is no stranger to Stouffville and Uxbridge, having frequently worked in the area during his *Second City* days.