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Completely average movie forces critic into apathy

By Peg Sheldrick

It is customary in movie reviews to either adore or deplore the film in question, and it's usually fairly easy to characterize a new release as being really good or really bad. But once in a while a film comes along that is so overwhelmingly average a reviewer is left speechless. *Same Time, Next Year* falls into that category.

review

This romantic comedy is at times mildly funny, mildly silly, mildly touching and mildly boring. The story comes to the screen almost completely unaltered from its successful stage run—there are even little pauses between scenes where everything grinds to a halt for a minute or so.

On stage, the pauses would allow time for the set to be changed. On the screen, instead of being eliminated they are used for little photo essays about the passing years while the audience is treated to yet another hearing of the film's mildly pretty theme song.

Writer Bernard Slade and director Robert Mulligan were evidently laboring under the misapprehension that the best adaptation is no adaptation, and the result is only mildly successful.

Doris Day approach

The charm of the movie rests on the audience's willingness to accept the premise that two people who are irresistibly attracted to one another would be willing to settle for an annual weekend fling with virtually no contact in between. This Doris Day approach to adultery, in this day and age, is novel, to say the least.

The location chosen for the film is certainly lovelier than any set ever could have been, so the film does have that advantage over the play. And one advantage both have is Ellen Burstyn as the female half of the philandering pair. She is certainly what makes the film worth seeing, and it is clear that her acting does more to make her character plausible than the writer did.

Alda only mediocre

Alan Alda, an excellent actor, turns in a performance that is only mediocre. He rants and hams his way through the first half and barely recaps his losses in the latter half. The film as a whole is better when the characters reach

middle age and beyond. They begin to behave more as real people do; their dialogue is more like dialogue than ersatz Neil Simon. (Early scenes are afflicted with an overabundance of one liners).

To its credit, the film does show its female protagonist growing and maturing from a complacent, uneducated homebody to a competent business woman. In fact, Burstyn's character is rather idealized. Alda's remains the same lovable ninny to the end, though he does mellow with age.

The script is one of the major problems in the film. There are laughs from occasional flashes of wit and some—not all—of the gags. But there are also long pauses between them. Part of what is meant to sustain the audience's interest is watching the characters change from year

to year, but the changes are so sudden at times they become cheap gags.

For example, 1968 finds Burstyn in love beads and headband attending Berkeley and Alda in a blue suit urging the use of the bomb in Vietnam. At times the people don't seem to be developing so much as shifting from archetype to archetype.

The film does have its moments, and soft hearts will find themselves sniffing from time to time. For a film about adultery the movie is remarkably pristine; the dialogue is the most graphic aspect. The film could be a lot more offensive—or a lot more obnoxious—for that matter a lot more anything. As it is *Same Time, Next Year* isn't bad, but it isn't much.

Same Time, Next Year is playing at the Cinema 2 Theatre.



Photo courtesy of Universal Studios

Alan Alda and Ellen Burstyn embrace during a scene in *Same Time, Next Year*.

Film tickets go on sale

Series tickets for the 1979-80 Foreign Film Series will go on sale Tuesday in the Nebraska Union.

The series contains 12 films, including one documentary, *A Sense of Loss*, which is directed by Marcel Ophuls.

Tickets may be purchased in the North Lobby next week and the South Desk anytime. Student tickets are \$10, faculty and non-UNL student's tickets are \$12 and patron tickets are \$15.

news

After 14 hours, jury finds Ellis guilty of manslaughter

By Val Swinton

A Lancaster County Court Jury late Saturday night found John R. Ellis guilty of manslaughter in the death of a UNL student, Debra A. Forycki.

The jury deliberated nearly 14 hours before reaching the manslaughter verdict.

Judge William Blue, in his instructions Friday, told the jury it could return a verdict of first-degree murder, second-degree murder, manslaughter or not guilty. Manslaughter carries a one- to 10-year prison term.

"It's not my place to feel pleased about the verdict," County Attorney Ron Lahners said when asked about his reaction to the jury's decision.

Lahners added he felt the verdict reflected the evidence and said he felt "it's the totality of all the circumstances involved" and not one piece of evidence that led the jury to its verdict. Ellis originally was charged with first-degree murder by the county attorney's office.

Eight-month investigation

The jury's decision culminates an eight-month investigation into the death of Forycki, who disappeared on Oct. 3, 1974

while on her way to work in downtown Lincoln.

In her closing argument to the jury on Friday, Lahners indicated that the evidence eliminated all suspects but Ellis, with facts including his familiarity with the Elmwood area, where the Forycki skeleton was found; the fact that blond hairs matching those of Forycki were found in Ellis' car; and a statement he had made to a cellmate in Cass County that the wooded area near Elmwood would be a good spot to hide a body.

Defense attorney John Stevens Berry, in his closing arguments, called the prosecution's case "a paper chain ripped apart by reasonable doubt," telling the jury that the state had failed to prove a direct link between Forycki and Ellis.

"As of seven minutes to six, on April 27, 1979, the death of Debra Forycki is still a mystery," he declared to the jurors.

Surprise witness

Shortly before closing arguments, the defense produced a surprise witness on Friday: Carrie Jenkins, friend of Forycki, said she saw the victim on Oct. 3, 1974, the day Forycki disappeared, in the Miller and Paine Tea Room, where Jenkins worked as

a waitress. She said she saw Forycki in the restaurant between 12 and 12:30 p.m. on that day. Forycki reportedly had a luncheon engagement at 11:30 a.m. at the now-defunct St. George and the Dragon restaurant downtown.

However, the prosecution provided rebuttal witnesses, including a former Miller and Paine employee and Jenkins' husband, who testified that it may actually have been the day before her disappearance that Forycki was seen by Jenkins at Miller and Paine.

Satisfied with verdict

After the verdict, jurors generally refused comment on how or why they had reached the manslaughter verdict, although one juror said she was "very satisfied" with the verdict.

Lahners complimented the jury on the amount of time it took to reach a verdict, saying that considering the amount of evidence before them, "about 14 hours of deliberation time, I thought, was rather tremendous."

"I'm sure the jury worked hard and I'm sure they tried to be fair," Berry said. "I have always believed in John Ellis' innocence, so naturally I had hoped for a not guilty verdict."

Berry also pointed out a positive side to the jury's decision: "Manslaughter is not as bad a verdict as could have been reached. He was convicted of the least serious crime of which the judge instructed the jury."

More court appearances

Berry said he has worked without fee in the case because of his belief in Ellis' innocence. He added that a Lincoln investigating firm, the J.C. Security Firm, had also worked free-of-charge investigating Forycki's death and probably would continue the investigation.

Ellis' court appearances are not yet over. Berry indicated an appeal probably will be filed and said that this week, "the appropriate papers to reserve all of John Ellis' rights for further proceedings" would be filed with the court. Expected among those papers will be a motion for a new trial.

Also Judge Blue refused to rule Saturday night on whether or not to grant Ellis bond, indicating he would set a hearing date today (Monday). He has been held in the Lancaster County jail without bond.

Ellis emerged from the courtroom Saturday looking composed, but on the advice of Berry, he refused to comment on his conviction.