

Arts & Entertainment

Strength of 'Frances' belongs to Jessica Lange

By Mike Frost

In a way, it's appropriate that the movie's title is summed up in one word, "Frances," because so much of its strength can be summed up in one word as well: Jessica.

"Frances" is the moving film biography (although sometimes the term "biography" is an inappropriate one) of actress Frances Farmer. Most moviegoers have never heard of Farmer, because, just as her career was gearing up, she suffered a series of nervous breakdowns, landing herself in a number of mental institutions for the next decade or so.

Farmer wrote an autobiography before she died in 1970 entitled *Will There Really Ever Be a Morning*. However, the book was virtually ignored for more than 10 years. Now, in typical overkill fashion, Hollywood has jumped on a Frances Farmer bandwagon. First, a TV movie was prepared (a predictably limp effort, encumbered by the usual limitations imposed on all TV productions) and now a major motion picture, starring budding actress Jessica Lange.

The casting of Lange as Frances Farmer was one of sheer brilliance. Someone with much foresight must have been able to spot

Lange's potential. Surely her screen work up to now has been unexceptional at best. (This movie was made before "Tootsie," in which Lange has a pivotal, yet ultimately undemanding, role). However, Lange meets and surpasses even the most optimistic expectation in "Frances."

Much of this can be attributed to the kinship between actresses Frances Farmer and Jessica Lange. Besides the physical similarities (usually the sole criterion for casting in a screen biography), both Lange and Farmer achieved their initial burst of success in their late 20s. Both faced difficulties with studio executives who didn't take their talents seriously. Both hoped to enter the alluring world of intellectual art (Farmer through an affair with playwright Clifford Odets, Lange through a well-publicized liaison with Mikhail Baryshnikov), and both ultimately received the same abrupt heave-ho from their lovers. Both were left with lifelong tokens of their affairs — Lange with a child, Farmer with the mental scars that would eventually lead to her incarceration in a host of mental institutions.

There is a major difference between the two, however. Jessica survived, Frances did not. This dissimilarity seems to be the catalyst for Lange's brilliant portrayal. The

actress seems to totally empathize with Frances' plight. The emotions we see in this picture are real. Lange does what so few thespians are able to do: leave the realm of playing a character and actually become that character.

Nothing can ever come close to Lange's performance, although sometimes it seems as if no one is trying to.

Kim Stanley, as Farmer's domineering mother, seems to totter between Faye Dunaway's portrayal of Joan Crawford and Viki Lawrence's Mama. While Lange portrays a real person, Stanley seems intent on making Mrs. Farmer nothing more than a character in a screenplay, and her performance suffers for it.

Sam Sheppard's portrayal of Harry York is adequate, although an even stronger actor could not justify this character's existence. York is a totally fictional character, created to serve as both a quasi-narrator and as a reference point for Farmer's mental deterioration. He is the happiness and sanity she can always have, yet will always reject.

While that might be an important function, it lends a ring of untruth to an otherwise credible biography. Since York is pivotal in so many scenes, he becomes unable to tell what is truth and what is fiction. Farmer's real story was dramatic enough — the fictionalization of it is unnecessary.

Except for this flaw (it is a serious one, to be sure), the script is a moving piece of screenwriting. Writers Eric Bergren, Christopher DeVore and Nicholas Kazan do a moving job of depicting Frances' mental deterioration, and the subsequent sadistic treatment she received. More than anything else, they relate the absolute horror of seeing a young, intelligent woman, because of what probably is only a slight mental disorder, first abused and then totally discarded by society. The final scene, where a "cured" Farmer blankly stumbles off toward an uncertain future, is one of the most moving sequences in the film.

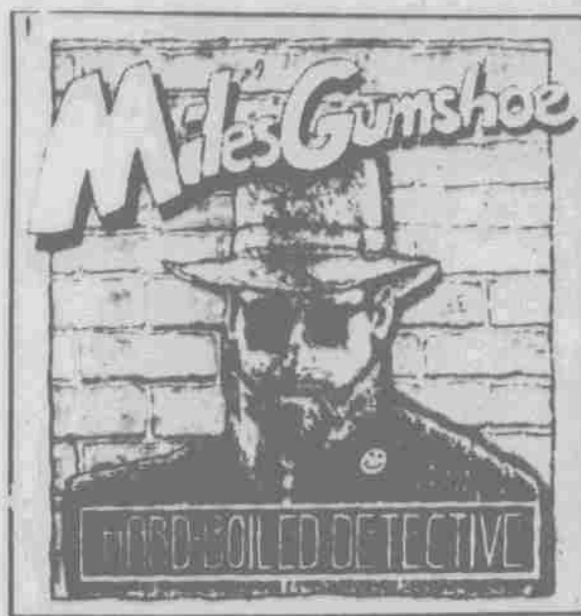
The script is aided by the careful direction of Graeme Clifford. Through the effective use of water in many of the crucial scenes, Clifford gives the whole production an almost impressionistic air. Similarly, the "snake pit" sequences (the bowels of mental institutions) are both moving and horrific, certainly more terrifying than the most gory horror film could be.

Rumor has it that "Frances" was rushed into release in order to be included in this year's Academy nominations. And like the title, the Academy nominations can only include one name: Jessica. "Frances" is truly Jessica Lange's picture. Lange is a brilliant actress. "Frances," then, is a brilliant film.

Gumshoe experiences pain in shape of nice place to die

By Pat Clark

The G. Cue: I made my move on the GQ Guy, but he dissolved into the rockabilly nirvana at the Morell Majority meeting. I nabbed instead a guy named Mustafena Miztaykh, the haze-voiced nightfly at KZEN-FM. Got him snugly around the ankle, with the other half of the cuffs clamped firmly to my wrist. It was the kind of a snare only one guy in a million makes. It was a shame to take this opportunity away from 999,999 other guys.



I could tell right away that the do-wa diddlers on the dance floor had taken a dislike to the slapstick waltz Miztaykh and I made of standing up. The one they call Brother Lou pointed a finger at us and urged on the bedlam brotherhood, crooning, "If you think you'd like to shake and push, go ahead." Miztaykh and I made silent and hasty confederation in an effort to put the Showcase behind us. Miztaykh scrambled to his feet first and lunged in the general direction of the door. I followed in a St. Vitus shuffle on my hands and knees.

Two feet not belonging to either of us blocked the path. They were the kind of feet that let you see the anger smoldering behind hammer toes, the kind of feet that my unguarded face wished were miles away.

"You ingrate!" came the voice. I

recognized it as the voice of the dame I encountered in the john at O'Rourke's. "I pay your way in and then you disappear," she said, punctuating her tirade with a viper swipe at my shoulder with her unyielding boot. "You men are all alike," she screamed, glaring at Miztaykh with acupuncture eyes. "I hope you'll be very happy together."

Miztaykh voiced a rescue lie. "Couldn't be helped, ma'am," he said, with the kind of voice you could pour over pancakes. "Police business." He flashed what he later revealed to me was a Waverly public library card. "Don't worry, he will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." He leaned closer to the dame's face, as though to exchange a confidence. "We've been looking for this one for years."

The dame let us through, but not without claiming a generous pound of my flesh with a final swift kick. It was the kind of a kick that made the Gumshoe family line a tortured thought for the distant future.

I could hear Mona Vermaimi screaming white noise about calling the cops and Miztaykh saying something about fire code violations that must have ended the tirade, but mostly I could hear and see and feel pain, pure pain; native bearers carrying clay pots full of pain, pain with a good beat that was easy to dance to, pain in the shape of a nice place to curl up and die.

I knew I was still alive because I had to go to the bathroom. I didn't want to open my eyes, but I could hear a voice drip liquid welcome in through all of the openings on my Play-Doh face:

"... and that was The Beatles on the KZEN weekend Pagoda Party and next up we will be opening a few Doors..."

The voice stopped, but I had heard enough. I looked up through rheumy eyes at Miztaykh's face. It was the kind of a face that made you think of Groucho Marx posing as Mahatma Gandhi. "Miztaykh," I gargled.

"That's an understatement," he said calmly.

"Izzisa studio?" I said, in mastery of the obvious.

"Where else would we be?" he said.

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WEEKEND

The following is a list of local happenings for the coming weekend, today through Sunday:

BARS

Aku Tiki Lounge, 5200 O St. — All Spice tonight through Saturday, \$1.50 cover.

Chesterfield, Bottomsley & Potts, 245 N. 13th St. — North Wynd Friday and Saturday, no cover.

Drumstick, 547 N. 48th St. — Pinky Black and the Excessives tonight \$2 cover. The Staff Friday and Saturday, \$2 cover.

Green Frog, 1010 P St. — Ecstasy, tonight through Saturday, no cover.

Larry's Showcase, 1316 N. St. — Bone and the Boilers tonight, \$1.50 cover. The Morells Friday and Saturday, \$4 cover.

Little Bo's West, 2630 Cornhusker Highway — Wondersea tonight through Saturday, no cover.

Judges, 2630 Cornhusker Highway — Mainstreet tonight through Saturday, \$2 cover.

Living Room Lounge, 1501 Cedar Park Road — Carol Howard Friday and Saturday, no cover.

McGuffey's, 1042 P St. — Jazz Society tonight, no cover. Paul Burner Friday and Saturday, \$1 cover.

Pla-Mor Ballroom, 6600 W. O St. — Dennis Wesely Saturday. Dean Hansen, Sunday.

Rivera's, 1920 W. O St. — Fire and Ice Friday and Saturday, no cover.

Sidetrack, 7th and P streets — Joyce Durand, tonight through Saturday, no cover.

Sweep Left, 815 O St. — Pud Brothers Friday and Saturday, \$2 cover.

Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St. — The Backbeats tonight, \$1 cover. The Legendary Blues Band Friday and Saturday, \$4.50 cover.

MISCELLANEOUS

Kimball Recital Hall, UNL campus — Symphonic Band, tonight at 8 p.m. John Browning, piano, Friday at 8 p.m. The University Orchestra Sunday at 3 p.m.

Howell Theatre, UNL campus — "The Skin of Our Teeth" tonight through Saturday, 8 p.m.

THEATERS

Cinema 1 and 2, 13th and P streets — "Frances" — 7 and 9:30 p.m.; "Videodrome" — 7:45 and 9:45 p.m.

Cooper, 54th and O streets — "Gandhi" 8 p.m.

Douglas 3, 1300 P St. — "Sophie's Choice" — 5:40 and 8:30 p.m.; "The Man From Snowy River" — 5:20, 7:20 and 9:20 p.m.; "The Verdict" — 5:10, 7:25 and 9:45 p.m.

East Park 3, 6100 O St. — "Treasure of the Four Crowns" — 5:20, 7:20 and 9:20 p.m.; "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial" — 5:25, 7:35 and 9:45 p.m.; "Lcvesick" — 5:30, 7:30 and 9:30 p.m.

Embassy, 1730 O St. — "Deep Throat" 10 a.m., 12:15, 2:30, 4:45, 7, 9:15 and 11:30 p.m., 1:15 a.m.; "The Devil in Miss Jones" — 11 a.m., 1:15, 3:30, 5:45, 8, 10:15 p.m., 12:30 and 2:15 a.m.

Joyo, 6102 Havelock Ave. — "An Officer and a Gentleman" — 7:30 p.m.

Plaza 4, 12th and P streets — "48 HRS." — 7:45 and 9:45 p.m.; "The Lords of Discipline" — 7:30 and 9:30 p.m.; "Treasure of the Four Crowns" — 7 and 9 p.m.; "A Boy and His Dog" — 7:15 and 9:15 p.m.

Sheldon Film Theatre — 12th and R streets — Chinese Cinema: Films From Taiwan — tonight thru Monday.

State, 1415 O St., — "The Sting II" 7:30 and "The Year of Living Dangerously" 9:35 p.m.

Stuart, 13th and P streets — "Tootsie" 1, 3:10, 5:30, 7:40 and 9:45 p.m.