

'Moscow' instills patriotism without sermons

By Ward W. Triplett III

Don't be fooled by the cluttered, *Continental Divide*-inspired ad or Robin Williams's track record. *Moscow on the Hudson* is the best post-Oscar nomination film to open so far.

Paul Mazursky's poignant tale about a Russian circus musician (Williams) who defects during a supervised tour of Bloomingdale's isn't perfect by

but through the seriousness, Vladimir and Lucia have a not-so-typical movie love affair that takes over much of the middle part of the movie. The characters grow together as Vladimir tries to adjust to the capitalist system (including serving time as a waiter and selling everything from watches to hot dogs in Central Park), and apart as both try to become American.

As a comedy, *Moscow* works because of Williams. The former Mork, Garp and whoever that guy was in the *Survivors* is in his best role yet here. Vladimir's understated humor fits the old multi-dimensional Williams from Mork quite well. Behind him, Derricks, late of the Broadway production of *Dream Girls* simply has a strong role to work with in Lionel, while Alonzo, who also wrote one of the film's original songs, has a winner of a role as well. Both she and Derricks create friends in Lucia and Lionel that transcend Vladimir and hits the audience directly.

The three major characters are supported by an almost 100 percent ethnic cast. Perhaps that helped make the film so likeable. We always get white American lifestyles in these films, but *Moscow's* approach, which shows off the cultural bag big cities really are, is refreshing and quite a joy to see.

Moscow smacks of one of those semi-classics that attempts to teach as much as it attempts to entertain. But the overall impact of it doesn't set in until after it's over, as Mazursky thankfully avoided many

sermons about how wrong the Soviet or American lifestyles are. Instead, the good and the bad are for the most part implicit with Williams' quirkiness and awkward balancing between his past and present means of relating the message that the good in this country outweighs the bad by quite a bit.

On that note, *Moscow's* patriotism makes it the strongest pro-United States film since, well whatever the last John Wayne war movie was, I guess. At one point, as Williams laments to his Cuban lawyer (Orlando Ramiriz) about his struggles and how freedom wasn't a reality for all, he encounters another former Russian, who disagrees. After a confrontation, the Russian has Williams recite the first line of the Constitution. Next thing you know, everyone in the place is reciting a line.

Ordinarily, that would have come off as corny, trite and laughable. But in the context of the film, it's sort of the culmination of the swelling pride Vladimir has in just being in the country.

It must have also gotten to some other members of the audience at the Cinema 2 as well. Several people started reading the lines with the actors, which I found myself doing almost immediately.

Moscow on the Hudson isn't the type of movie that ends up with center stage on Oscar night. But if you can't remember the last time you left a movie feeling good about yourself and this country, this is the best ticket in town.

Film Review

any means. It's just got to be harder for a Soviet to defect and adjust than the film lets on. It's also shamelessly patriotic at points.

But *Moscow's* appeal is that while it's a constant, light comedy about the lives of ethnic minorities in New York, it also gets a sense of fear and danger from each of its main characters about their new lives. While Williams (as Vladimir) has to constantly worry about KGB agents, his Italian girlfriend Lucia (Maria Conchado Alonzo) loves New York but has trouble leaving Italy behind, and his black roommate Lionel (Clevant Derricks), who can relate to Vladimir's situation since he too is a foreigner in New York (he's from Alabama), has to deal with not being able to be a father to his daughter in Alabama.

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