

Film depicts battle with death

'Postman' delivers high emotion

By Mark Baldridge

Film Critic

Watching a man wither and die on the big screen can be a painful experience. In Michael Radford's film "The Postman," which opens tonight at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theatre, it also can be moving.

"Postman" is a film best known for events off screen. A current nominee for Best Picture and Best Actor at the Academy Awards — an interesting development on several fronts — the film is notorious for the death of its principal player the day after photography was completed.

Massimo Troisi, renowned as a comic in his native Italy, was plagued by heart problems throughout the shooting of the film, able to walk only a few steps before having to sit down and rest. His suffering is palpable on the screen; it's not hard to imagine one is watching a future corpse.

And though that very vulnerability is what makes his character appeal to many critics, it would be considered overdone had it not been so real. The ironies of "Postman" are several. Ostensibly a film about unlikely friendship and the seductive nature of poetry, it is also a film about early and senseless death. This aspect of the film is emphasized unattractively by Troisi's off-screen death.

For some viewers, a minority, the death of an actor makes all his or her films harder to watch. But Troisi's dying is undoubtedly the best thing that could have happened to this movie.



The late actor Massimo Troisi, who was nominated for Best Actor in this year's Academy Awards, stars in the Italian film "The Postman."

But the film has many virtues that may go unnoticed in the hype: the understated and masterful portrayal of maestro Pablo Neruda (infamous, surrealist poet of love and communism) by Philippe Noiret ("Cinema Paradiso"); the stunning sensuality (underdeveloped in the film, unfortunately) of Sicilian supporting actress Maria Grazia Cucinotta; and an almost hallucinatory intensity of story.

Director Radford ("1984") worked marvelously with Troisi's physical limitations to create a film that's really sadder than it wants to be.

The Facts

Film: "The Postman"
Star: Massimo Troisi
Director: Michael Radford
Rating: unrated
Grade: B+
Five Words: Love, sensuality, poetry and death

This is a film that should have been more about humor and love and the power of beautiful words. It is all that, but it is also more. It's a movie drowning in its own context.

'California' in state of boredom

By Patrick Hambrecht
Senior Reporter

The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery has themed and trotted out a selection of its sculpture collection in "California Color," to be displayed until something better comes along.

The reserved and bare-bones mentality of the artists, all exhibited in a series of no-risk, professional statements, adds up to a sedate and gentle bore.

While some of the pieces are interesting by themselves, these California objects are much more likely to complement an up-scale Hollywood

office than stir any feeling.

The unobtrusive "The Lake in the Mountains is Frozen After the Snow" by Sam Richardson shines with the unmoving "California Color" spirit.

The smooth fiberglass and plastic relief map seems to have been chiseled out of a tediously mature cartoon for the PBS crowd, the type that is paid for by an obscure industrial foundation and used to fill up space between "Upstairs, Downstairs" and "The Star Hustler."

If Richardson had hurled his panorama on the floor and stomped on it a few times, the piece might be more interesting, if not improved.

"Glass Cube Cal #8," "Shame it

Isn't Soft" and "Zeno" alone seem to emanate energy with differing impersonal presences.

The mirrored glass cube seems to have the most chutzpah, reflecting light and imposing its grand, vacuous personality on everyone around it. Unlike the other California pieces, Larry Bell's cube is paradoxically gleeful with its own austere depthlessness.

"California Color" is now on display at the Sheldon. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, Thursday through Saturday evenings from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Time Warner to invade England

LONDON (AP) — Saying it aims to bolster the British film industry, a British TV station has teamed up with the American media group Time Warner to propose building a film and television complex with a theme park in northwest London.

The \$344 million complex on more than 150 acres on the western outskirts of London would be called Warner Brothers Movie World and showcase Looney Tunes characters and movie heroes such as Batman.

It would have film and TV studios, theme rides and stage shows based on English and American films and characters — plus a history of the British cinema.

Lord Hollick, managing director of MAI, said: "Movie World will provide a major boost for the British film industry by giving the United Kingdom the capacity to meet the demands of an increasingly global film and TV industry."

"The studios will also reinforce West London's concentration of specialist media skills and help to retain the nation's wealth of film and television-making talent."

Many film and television workers live in the area, which is close to both Pinewood and Shepperton film studios and the BBC Television Center.

Sandy Reisenbach, Warner Brothers' executive vice president for mar-

keting and planning, said the concept would be based on the blueprint operating since 1991 in Queensland, Australia. Warner Brothers and MAI each pledged \$1.07 million to fund the initial phase of the Movie World project.

The partners, seeking permission for the complex, expressed confidence that the complex would open by spring 1999.

Shortly after the plans were announced, however, three legislators from the governing Conservative Party whose Parliamentary constituencies are in or near the proposed site announced their opposition to the project.

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