

'The Apostle' takes real look at religion



ROBERT DUVAL received a Best Actor Oscar nomination for his starring role as the Rev. Euliss "Sonny" Dewey in "The Apostle." Duvall also wrote, directed and produced the film, which opens at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater Thursday night.

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and meets brother Blackwell. Despite reservations, Blackwell helps the Apostle find a new church, called the One Way Road to Heaven temple. The Apostle wins over brother Blackwell, influential radio station owner Elmo (Rick Dial) and a racist southern "good ole boy" (Billy Bob Thornton) while building an impressive congregation. The rest of the movie would be spoiled if any more plot twists were unveiled.

Robert Duvall gives perhaps his finest performance as Sonny/the Apostle. Duvall gives the character dignity and even restraint, not easy to do when most of his lines consist of "Praise God!" and "Hallelujah!" Duvall proves through his portrayal that evangelical Christian preachers are not all cynical, stuck-up money grabbers (a la Jimmy Swaggart or Jim Bakker). Duvall's accuracy and believability probably make all charismatic Christians want to stand up and say "Amen!" It is not surprising Duvall has been nominated for an Academy Award.

As for the other actors, Rick Dial as Elmo was funny, touching and real. Billy Bob Thornton, in a small but integral role as a racist

Southerner, makes you feel as though you've just been to church and converted yourself. June Carter Cash and Farrah Fawcett were believable in small roles. Miranda Richardson was very good as Toosie, a separated woman with whom the Apostle/Sonny falls in love.

"The Apostle" highlights all the joys of the Pentecostal religion, from the entertainment value of the preaching and singing to the spirituality of the churchgoers and ministers. Duvall felt so strongly about this film that he financed it himself after 10 years of fruitlessly trying to interest a major studio in it.

"The Apostle" is realistic, touching, funny in spots and very moving in others. It has every virtue of any good movie, while treating its subject (charismatic Christianity in general and the Pentecostal religion in particular) with extreme dignity and restraint.

"The Apostle" opens at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater Thursday. It will continue Friday through Sunday, and March 26-29. Screenings are at 6:15 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on Thursdays and Fridays; and at 12:45 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:15 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

Talented cast can't save film

The Facts

Title: "The Man in the Iron Mask"
Stars: Leonardo DiCaprio, Gabriel Byrne, John Malkovich, Jeremy Irons
Director: Randall Wallace
Rating: PG-13
Grade: C-
Five Words: Big names offer little quality

BY JASON HARDY
Film Critic

"The Man in the Iron Mask" is packed with talented actors, beautiful scenery, detailed costumes and voluptuous women.

Too bad it was all a waste.

The movie slowly moves through a predictable plot that distorts history and wastes the cast of exceptional actors.

With big names such as Jeremy Irons, Gerard Depardieu and John

Malkovich, one expects much more than this film delivers.

The aforementioned actors, along with Gabriel Byrne, play The Four Musketeers, who hatch a plan to switch the French king (Leonardo DiCaprio) with his twin brother (also played by DiCaprio), who has been wearing an iron mask in solitary confinement for the past six years.

As the story goes there are a few interesting side plots, but none of them are explored enough to offer any real significance.

While the plot itself was kind of interesting, it needed to be revamped to be less predictable and more fast-paced. The few action scenes were weak and the great swashbuckling heroics traditionally associated with the Musketeers just weren't there.

Another problem was the characters' accents, or lack thereof. Dialogue ranged from Depardieu's almost inaudible French-induced mumbling to DiCaprio's clean American English.

The women of the film all spoke with extremely thick French accents, while Malkovich delivered almost every line with a toothy snarl that lost meaning halfway through the film.

The movie as a whole had the same feel as a paper written the morning it's due. There was no real depth to it, and the characters were introduced but not really elaborated upon, leaving a lot of shallow people in a cluttered plot that offers the audience no real attachment.

This is what prevented the big-name talents of this film from spreading their thespian wings. While the main actors do a fairly good job, they don't do a great job. And that's what's expected when you pile this many stars into one film.

The end effect is a frustrating two hours and 15 minutes of wondering which would be worse, wearing the iron mask or seeing this movie again.

'120 Live' offers collection of tunes

Various Artists
"MTV 120 Minutes Live"
Atlantic Records
Grade: A

As far as compilations go, it doesn't get much better than this.

Sure, the producers of "120 Live" could have included more songs and made the album a double disc, but the 14 tracks they have collected from the more than 100 bands that have performed at the "120 Minutes" studios are admirable ones.

MTV created "120 Minutes" more than 10 years ago with the hopes that the show would become a spotlight for new music and artists, and thanks to the program's directors, producers and loyal viewers, it has become just that.

Every Sunday night, "120 Minutes" presents two hours of videos and interviews that normally never appear during MTV's prime time hours, and the Oasis, Weezer and Verve Pipe live performances on the album were recorded before any of these bands had become familiar to the general public.

"120 Live" documents some of the most talented musicians in the world.

Music

The song "Kimberly Austin," off of Porno For Pyros' second album "Good God's Urge," includes original Jane's Addiction vocalist Perry Farrell and drummer Stephen Perkins, the bass of punk rock pioneer Mike Watt, and former Porno for Pyros guitar player Peter Dinklage. Farrell's singing and songwriting talents always make for great music, whichever band he decides he's in.

When Weezer visited the "120" studios back in '94 for an interview, they had just released their self-titled debut album. The level of success that followed for the young L.A. band should have been of no surprise to anyone, because the performance of "Undone (The Sweater Song)" on the set of "120" is incredible.

Old-school British punks, the Sex Pistols, broke up eight years before "120" had even become a show on MTV. But when the band joined forces again for a reunion tour back in '96, they played a high energy rendition of "Pretty Vacant," a song off of their famous "Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols" album, for the "120" cast and crew.

The song "Crazy Mary" initially became popular after Pearl Jam covered it for "Sweet Relief: A Benefit For Victoria Williams," an album that helped Williams raise money for her medical bills after she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1992. Williams brought along Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground to sing and play guitar with her when she appeared on "120" and performed "Crazy Mary."

The producers of "120 Live" could not have picked a better way to end the album than with the melodic and sweet sounds of Radiohead and their song "Fake Plastic Trees," which appears on their second album "The Bends." Radiohead's lead singer, Thom Yorke, owns one of the most sensational singing voices in music today, one of the many reasons why Radiohead's shows are frequented by other musicians and people inside the industry.

"120 Live" is a must for enthusiasts of live recordings. The album's different musical styles range immensely from start to finish, from the angst-filled force of Bad Religion one minute to the piercing lament of Bjork's tongue the next. What more could a music junkie ask for in a record?

— Jim Zavodny

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