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'Cider House' ending weak

By Shelley Mika

Staff writer

Remember those telephone commercials that jerked tears out of romantics all across the country? You know the ones, daughter calls Mom from college, tells her she loves her and misses her, tear falls from Mom's eye and, much to your surprise, your eyes, too.

"The Cider House Rules" is much like those commercials. A whole lot of wrenching emotional scenes - and for what? To be sold long distance?

No, to be sold a typical ending. "The Cider House Rules" follows Homer (Tobey Maguire) from the orphanage where he has spent his youth out into the real world.

Though Homer's mentor, guardian and doctor of the orphanage (Michael Caine), has taught Homer his trade as an obstetrician, Homer feels he must explore the world.

The story is set in 1943, yet a few surprising themes, such as abortion and incest, run in and out of the plot.

But perhaps the most surprising thing about "The Cider House Rules" is that it's a well-put-together film, yet it somehow disappoints at the

Most notably, the performances

are the film's top selling point. It's possible that no other actor could have been better chosen than Maguire.

As the young, naive and yet wisefor-his-age Homer, he brings to the role the perfect amount of wide-eyed awe mixed with concentrated profun-

Equally as good are the younger orphans in the film. Many times it's hard to find one child actor in a film who isn't chosen simply for chubby cheeks or a winning smile; here there is a whole group. The children give incredible performances rarely matched by stars of the same age.

And on top of it all, singer Erykah Badu is successful in her big-screen debut, bringing emotional depth to a supporting character role.

In fact, all of the characters are well-developed and acted, although some stand out more than others.

"The Cider House Rules" wins again in its masterful balance of drama, humor and wisdom. Though not a fast-paced film by any means, it keeps a well-maintained rhythm from nature of the rest of the film, one feels beginning to end.

Perhaps the credit for this goes to novel and the screenplay. Or perhaps director Lasse Hallstrom has a naturTHE CIDER HOUSE RULES

> TYPE: Film DIRECTOR: Lasse Hallstrom

STARRING: Tobey Maguire, Michael Caine, Charlize Theron and Erykah Badu

RATED: PG-13

GRADE: B

FIVE WORDS: Good film ruined by end

al feel for pacing. Either way, the film moves along with several tear-inspiring moments without any hokey sentimentality.

With all of these great qualities it's hard to understand why "The Cider House Rules" ends up being only slightly above average. For the most part, the end, although suitable, is completely unsurprising.

After the relatively unpredictable pretty let down.

Homer's journey is a round trip John Irving, who wrote both the without any real emotional souvenirs to show in the end.

Merger may ease music downloading

■ Major record companies wait for secure means to get paid royalities.

NEW YORK (AP) - The merger of America Online Inc. and Time Warner Inc. could turn out to be a hit with those who want their music served hot off the

Most music now available for downloading is either by relatively unknown artists or is bootlegged in violation of copyrights, but the merger could help change all that - hastening the day when customers of the company can snatch popular albums directly off the Web instead of buying \$16 CDs.

'One of the main barriers to consumers adopting online music has been the low volume of major-label music that's available on a legitimate basis," said Aram Sinnreich, an analyst with the Internet research firm Jupiter Communications Inc., on Wednesday.

"AOL Time Warner has the power to change that."

How? Time Warner owns one of the largest music businesses, with rights to top artists like Alanis Morissette, Madonna, Phil Collins and R.E.M. as

AOL, for its part, has a ready online audience of 22 million users and a coveted team of software developers.

By owning all the pieces to supplying online music on a broad scale, AOL Time Warner gains a ready edge over other companies that need to forge partnerships.

The promise of online music is compelling: Sales of downloaded online music are expected to grow from a minuscule \$1 million last year to \$1.1 billion by 2004, according to Forrester Research, making up about 6 percent of all music sales. That means fewer CDs sold at stores, as everyday Americans download songs to portable digital

Despite the potential, the recording industry thus far has refused to release its songs over the Internet until a secure method is widely adopted for making sure they get paid royalties for songs.

Time Warner chief executive Gerald Levin, at a news conference Monday, named online music as a top priority. While Time Warner also is a big film producer, movies are more difficult to distribute online, because even with high-speed Internet hookups they can take hours to download and video can appear jerky and inconsiswell as a cable-TV network ideal for tent. As a result widespread downloadhigh-speed transmission of music. ing of films is probably years away.

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While executives at America Online and Time Warner were vague about plans, speculation is rife.

The combined company, analysts say, may initially step up promotion of Time Warner's music to AOL's online users through ads as well as through links to Web sites where people can buy CDs through the mail.

In a second stage, Time Warner could transmit its music across existing slow-speed Internet connections to AOL users who pay an extra fee above its \$21.95 monthly subscription fee.

As Time Warner's cable-TV lines are upgraded for Internet use, the merged company could zap songs across these high-speed lines, resulting in better song quality and faster download times than across telephone lines.

America Online also plans to boost its existing online music efforts.

For instance, it already owns Spinner.com, one of the biggest sites for letting users listen to songs on their computer. This site uses "streaming" technology that allows people pay just pennies for each song they hear. While major artists are available, streaming doesn't let users record and keep the music on portable digital players.

AOL's site would be an ideal place for Time Warner to promote its trove of music, analysts said.

Combs indicted on gun charges

NEW YORK (AP) – Grammy-winning rap mogul Sean "Puffy" Combs was indicted Thursday on charges that he had two stolen guns in his sport utility vehicle as he fled a nightclub shoot-

One gun was found by police in the vehicle, and the other was thrown out of the vehicle, prosecutors said.

Two of Combs' associates were also named in the indictment: his rapping protégé Jamal "Shyne" Barrow on attempted murder charges and body-guare Amhony Jones on a weapons

Combs, 30, could get up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

"The decision to indict me is wrong," Combs said in a statement. "I'm innocent, and we will prove it. I am putting my faith in God, and I know my name will be cleared."

Three people were wounded in the shooting inside the crowded Club NY on Dec. 27, 1999.

Combs and girlfriend Jennifer Lopez were arrested after they drove away from the scene.



