

Framed Hare

For several decades, movie directors have attempted to seamlessly blend live action and animation. In the 1945 film [Anchor's Aweigh](#), Gene Kelly danced with Jerry Mouse. Dancing penguins served as waiters in Mary Poppins. Michael Jordan played basketball with Bugs Bunny and a multitude of other [Looney Tunes](#). There must be several other examples; however, one of the finest films to combine animated characters and live actors is 1988's [Who Framed Roger Rabbit](#). Bob Hoskins plays Eddie Valiant, a middle-aged detective investigating the murder of Marvin Acme (owner of Acme Products and Toontown). The prime suspect: Roger Rabbit, star of Maroon Cartoons. Roger is "framed" for the murder after he discovers that his beloved wife Jessica played patty cake with Acme. Valiant (who's brother was killed by a toon) reluctantly agrees to help Roger clear his good name. But, the plot takes a back seat to the cameo appearances by hundreds of cartoon characters. Black-and-white as well as color toons interact with each other as well as with their human counterparts. Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, Daffy Duck, Donald Duck, Betty Boop, and Droopy are just a few of the animated characters seen throughout the movie. Donald and Daffy's dueling piano scene is priceless. With the cast of characters seen throughout the movie, everyone is sure to find their favorite. Although a majority of the toons were created in the 1940s, most are easily recognizable.

Second star to the right...

and straight on til morning. This quote is from Sir James M. Barrie's [Peter Pan](#). Since the characters introduction in 1902,

the boy who never grew up has been the subject of stage plays, movies, cartoon series, books, AND PEANUT BUTTER. In 1991, Steven Spielberg brought to the big screen an adventure that few thought imaginable: a grown up Peter Pan in the film [Hook](#).

Robin Williams is cast as lawyer Peter Banning who has no time for his young son Jack's baseball games and carries his cell phone wherever he goes. In an ironic scene at the beginning of the movie, the cell phone goes off during his daughter Maggie's performance of (what else) "Peter Pan."

The Banning family travel to London to honor Granny Wendy and her orphanage. While there, Jack and Maggie are kidnapped by Captain Hook. Wendy informs Peter that he is indeed Peter Pan and the children have been kidnapped in an attempt to lure him to Neverland for one final battle. Unwilling to believe Wendy, Peter is eventually knocked out and dragged by Tinkerbell to Neverland.

The title character is played magnificently by Dustin Hoffman. The makeup makes him almost unrecognizable. Part of the fun in watching the DVD is seeing how many actors you can discover in the background: Phil Collins and Glenn Close both have small cameos.

Hook makes even the most stubborn of adults believe that buried deep inside of themselves there is a bit of the kid which all of us have inside. A great family film.

TV to Movie

One of the strangest trends in movies for the past several years has been to turn television shows of days gone by into big screen extravaganzas. For the most part, I do not see them

as being over successful. Probably, the most profitable venture into this phenomenon has been the Star Trek series. This is primarily because there was a built-in audience of fans who wanted to see the further voyages of Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and company. However, several other television shows have attempted to cross over and most have failed.

The Flintstones tried twice with live-action versions of the classic cartoon. While the first movie was relatively entertaining, *The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas* was a disaster. It featured a ridiculous looking computer generated version of the Great Gazoo (voiced by Alan Cummings). Even Ann-Margaret (reprising her role as Ann-Margrock from the original series) could not save the movie. Perhaps the *Jetsons* live-action movie (which has been in pre-production for about 5 years) will do better. Or maybe it is better to leave animated series as they are.... animated.

Several classic television comedies have also tried to become big screen movies. *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *Bewitched* to name a few. Does anyone even remember them? Nicole Kidman attempted to portray Samantha in a movie whose plot was a convoluted mess. *Beaver* tried to be a movie centered around plot devices audiences could watch on TV and reruns that were considerably better (for example, Beaver stuck in the giant coffee cup on top of a giant billboard). I think I have seen *The Beverly Hillbillies* once and remember NOT laughing at the hicks trying to integrate themselves into Beverly Hills life.

This summer audiences will be delight in two television comedies coming to the big screen. *Sex and the City* will star Sarah Jessica Parker and the rest of the cast of the original series. *Get Smart* brings the tremendous Steve Carell to the iconic role of Maxwell Smart, agent 86 of CONTROL.

Be Careful What You Watch

Last weekend was quite eventful: a wonderful performance of *Murder with a Silver Spoon* at Orchard Hills followed by a gathering to watch a movie. I have seen parodies and spoofs of the suspense movie *The Ring* on television almost since the movie was released in 2002. WOW... it is that old and I had yet to see it?! I have always enjoyed a good suspenseful film and this is definately a very strange one. You really need to pay attention and not drift to catch all of the nuances.

Naomi Watts plays Rachel, a young journalist who investigates the mysterious death of her niece. At the wake, Rachel overhears a group of teenagers discussing a video which a number of students watched 7 days prior to mysteriously dying... all at the same time on the same date. After watching the video herself, Rachel begins to see the exact images which were on the recording. These images lead the investigator on a race against time to prevent not only her death but also those of her young son and his father.

Perhaps the most mysterious character in the film is Rachel's son, Aidan (David Dorfman). The child seems to have a very eerie connection to the mystery. He draws pictures of people's deaths days before they occur. It is almost as if you expect him to utter the much quote phrase "I see dead people."

Several pieces of trivia about *The Ring* caught my attention. Primarily the fact that the movie is a remake of the recent Japanese film, *Ringu*. Also, the movie was directed by Gore Verbinski who directed the "Pirates of the Caribbean" trilogy.

The Ring is an intriguing suspense thriller which holds the viewers attention. Although it does have one scene of (I'm

sure and would hope) simulated animal endangerment, it is relatively devoid of gore. It is a fairly intelligent mystery.

Impossible Things Happen Every Day

There have been countless interpretations of the classic tale of "Cinderella." There is the classic Disney film, *Ella Enchanted*, *Pretty Woman*, *Cinderfella* (starring Jerry Lewis in a movie with a male twist to the tale), and several others in all media. My personal favorite is the Rodgers and Hammerstein version which began as a television special in 1957 starring a young Julie Andrews (fresh from her role as Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*).

I believe the role of the fairy godmother in this version is different than most interpretations. She not only creates a fancy dress, a wonderful carriage, and all the accessories to get Cinderella to the Prince's ball; she also encourages the young lady to get up and get out of her life of servitude to her evil stepmother. "Fal-do-ral and Fiddle-de-de. Fiddly faddly foodle; All the dreamers in the world are silly in the noodle." It is fine to dream about something but if you are unwilling to try and pursue a dream then a dream is all it will be.

Of course any musical is only as good as its supporting characters. One of the most memorable roles in *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella* is the Herald. He has the dauntless task of announcing to the townspeople that "The Prince is giving a ball." He has to sing through the mile long list that is the Prince's name as well as the King's and Queen's. The

Prince's name: Christopher Rupert Vwindemere Vlademere Carl Alexander Francois Reginald Lancelot Herman. Quite a mouthful! The Queen's name: Queen Constantina Charlotte Ermintrude Guinevere Maizie. The King's name: King Maxmillian Godfrey Ladislaus Leopold Sydney. Hope I did not forget anyone.

This version has been made into three other films and has been staged by numerous theatres. Most recently, a version was seen on television in 1995 starring Whitney Houston, Brandy, Whoopi Goldberg, Victor Garber, **AND** Jason Alexander. A perfect movie for the whole family.

QUIET!!!!

Ok... so last night was dress rehearsal for *Murder with a Silver Spoon* to be presented Saturday night at Orchard Hills Country Club in Bryan, Ohio. Let's just say it was an interesting rehearsal. To begin, our stage was cut from a huge space which was three smaller rooms minus retractable walls to one small area. Apparently, we were sharing the club with a group who was having a banquet. The space was not the important part. While waiting in the hall for their entrances, a few actors were told by the other group to keep the noise down... seriously. This proved to be very difficult especially for one performer who is full of energy and found it hard to keep the volume down while maintaining his energetic persona. He had to be constantly reminded to tone it down so we would not disturb the other room. Following the dress rehearsal, the director jokingly commented that she had trouble hearing anyone and that the energy was lacking. It was a good thing that Wednesday night's rehearsal was such a success.

Spread Some Sunshine

☒ Any family who sees themselves as dysfunctional needs to watch the movie *Little Miss Sunshine*. The Hoover clan gives new definition to the term. At the head of the household, we have the motivational speaker (played by Greg Kinnear) who is himself a total loser. The frazzled, chain smoking mother (Toni Collette) whose idea of a home-cooked meal is a bucket of fast food chicken... cleverly disguised as NOT KFC. The clinically depressed, suicidal uncle (the brilliant Steve Carell) who lost the title of #1 Proust student to the new lover of his ex-boyfriend. The rebellious, teenage, Nietzsche follower who has taken a vow of silence (Paul Dano). **FINALLY**, we have the fun-loving, expletive shouting, drug addicted grandfather (Alan Arkin). They all pile into the family VW van in order to take little Olive (Abigail Breslin) from Albuquerque to Redondo Beach to compete in the Little Miss Sunshine beauty contest.

While on this road trip, the Hoover's learn some valuable lessons. You should never apologize for yourselves no matter how dysfunctional you are. Little girls who eat ice cream may or may not get fat. **AND** (strangest of all) pornography can be viewed as a sign from God; or at least be useful when pulled over by the police.

While the film contains a magnificent ensemble cast, one character in the movie deserves extra credit. The poor van that almost seemed to have a personality all its own. It should have been given a screen credit. Its broken horn gave voice to the pain it must have been feeling as it continued on the long journey with a bunch of kooks. Not since **THE ORIGINAL** Herbie the Love Bug has a Volkswagen been as memorable a character as any human.

The Amazing Spider-Man

Returning to the genre of superhero franchise movies, one of the most successful series of movies in the last decade has been the three Spider-Man films. I believe that what has made these films so special is that they each retain the same core cast: Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker/Spider-Man), Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane Watson), and James Franco (Harry Osborne). Plus, Sam Raimi has been the director of each of the movies. So many times a franchise fails because it goes through multiple directors. The four main people involved in these films have each stated that if any of the others were to leave then they would also. I do not think a good Spider-Man movie could be made if any of them were to step aside.

Each of the films develops the three characters in new ways, primarily the main character. The original film shows how Peter becomes the webslinger and begins to accept the sage advice of his Uncle Ben: "With great power comes great responsibility." *Spider-Man 2* finds the hero attempting to find a balance between his life behind the mask and that of Peter Parker. *Spider-Man 3* takes Peter on a journey of his dark side and forces him to see how far his power can take him.

So many times action/adventure movies are just that: action, adventure but no character. With a director such as Sam Raimi who really cares about the characters he is putting on film, the three Spider-Man films thrived. Not only do audiences thrill to the escapades of "your friendly neighborhood superhero" but they also see into the life of Peter Parker and the characters around him.

Imagine

WOW... that is all I can say about the final singer on American Idol tonight (and I know that I am going off on another tangent here). When a 17 year old hopeful performs one of the most difficult songs from any era as if it were made for him then it deserves some acknowledgment. This is the first night I have actually had a chance to enjoy an episode with play practices going on and such. There were probably 3 of the top 10 guys whom I would even consider voting for (I do not vote). However when young David Archuleta came out and nailed John Lennon's "Imagine," I thought that he is sure to be one of the final contestants. Strangely, the performer chose to start on the final verse of the song. Randy Jackson even commented on the choice. Contestants are only allowed so much time to perform so David brilliantly chose to sing the verse that meant the most to him. The young man's tone, range, and overall execution of the classic song just sent chills throughout my whole body. I find it totally flabbergasting how a 17 year old (who was not alive when John Lennon wrote and sang the classic) could even attempt such a remarkable, challenging piece. I'm not sure that I would even try to master such a memorable selection.

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world*

Tis the season to be Mary

Ok... it is not Christmas time. However, as we are under a dreaded Winter Storm Warning I felt like talking about one of my favorite Yuletide movies. As I was playing Scene It with my niece earlier this evening, this question was raised: "In the National Lampoon Vacation movies, what was the nickname of Clark Griswold's son?" Of course anyone who has seen the misadventures of the Chicago suburban family knows the answer: Rusty.

Christmas Vacation is my favorite of the four films (yes, there were four... let us not forget the travesty that was *Vegas Vacation*). It shows the hapless Griswold clan as they do their best to entertain their whole extended family (both sides mind you). Everything from chopping down the family Christmas tree to the reading of "A Visit from St. Nick" on Christmas Eve. My favorite scene from this classic has to be Clark hanging from the eavestrough attempting to staple lights onto the roof. I can imagine my father doing the same thing... even attaching his coat sleeve to the roof and sliding down with the collapsing ladder.

One nitpicky bit though. Speaking of Rusty (as well as Audrey, the daughter), they seemed to age differently in each movie. The young man seemed to decrease in age between *European Vacation* and *Christmas Vacation*. Rusty was played by Jason Lively (?) in Europe and by Johnny Galecki (before he was cast as Darlene's boyfriend on "Roseanne") at Christmas. I often wondered why the change in age. It's not as if Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo, and Randy Quaid could decrease in age. Just a minor quibble to an otherwise hilarious holiday tradition.