## Wule Time Flicks Make Good Picks

by Michael Giltz

December and January are the traditional months in which studios unleash their Oscar hopefuls and rake in huge box-office dollars, as people turn to the movies for their wintertime entertainment.

Last year was no exception, and unlike its first few months, most of the later releases have been quite good. The big winner, according to Variety magazine, is Rocky IV which opened to mixed reviews and record-breaking, box-office totals. This installment of the Sylvester Stallone saga has already grossed more than \$86 million, and it recently expanded its release to total showings on 2,253 screens, more than any other film in history.

Nonetheless, Rocky IV may not equal the big winner of the 1984 Christmas season, Beverly Hills Cop. But, Eddie Murphy's smash hit was the only winner last year. Just one other Christmas release in 1984, 2010, made more than \$40 million.

This year has seen much stronger, across-the-board response to the films that opened, and that bodes well for the coming months Numerous movies have an excellent chance of grossing more than \$50 million and therefore becoming "smash hits," while one or two might achieve "blockbuster" status by pulling in more than \$100 million at the box office.

Certainly the most promising pairing of the year was that of Streep and Redford in Sydney Pollack's film Out Of Africa. As one would expect, they live up to grand expectations in this subtly moving adaptation of Isak Dinesen's memoirs.

This romantic tale recounts the adventures of Karen Blixen (Streep), a Danish-born woman who marries a baron for his title and for the excitement of moving to an African farm.

The baron, played wonderfully by Klaus Maria Brandauer, who only married her for her money, is constantly away on hunting trips, and Blixen soon resigns herself to running the plantation alone, a task that she begins to relish as she slowly falls in love with Africa and its people.

"... forces are obviously at work, and like a strong current or undertow, they slowly, inevitably drag the viewer under, until he is submerged and overwhelmed by The Color Purple."

Her busy life is disrupted by the appearance of Denys Finch Hatton (Redford), an adventurer who quickly finds himself intellectually and physically attracted to her.

Redford's screen persona is such that his mere presence is enough to justify Blixen's ensuing passion for him. His status as a cultural icon allows him to imbue Hatton with the larger-than-life quality so necessary for a film of this scope.

Streep more than holds her own against his formidable charisma, once again proving herself the consummate

American actress. Her impeccable master of accents allows Streep to be totally convincing as Blixen and yet rise above the label of mere character actress to the level of star.

Because of its understated passionate romance, its visual splendor, and its wide scope, Out Of Africa is a unique, exquisite film. A take of \$14 million after only two weeks, enthusiastic reviews and almost inevitable Oscar nominations point toward a guarantee of a lengthy run for this mature and old-fashioned romance.

Unfortunately, Out Of Africa is destined to be overshadowed by Spielberg's triumphant new film The Color Purple. Despite the limited release of this adaptation of Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize winning novel — it is only being screened in 202 theaters, and the controversial issues of wife abuse and lesbianism that it deals with, its universal appeal, and the magic name of Spielberg assure it of becoming one of the biggest winners of the season.

It tells the story of Celie (Whoppi Goldberg), a poor, black woman, near the turn of the century who has been abused by every man she has ever known. As a child, her father forces himself on her, and the children that result are taken away from her.

Goldberg's performance is especially terrific as Celie. Although her lines are not very character-revealing, she expresses herself through her eyes and body, and does a marvelous job. Still, even she is upstaged by the power of Oprah Winfrey, who steals every scene she's in, as the

## Movies from page 1

forthright Sofia. Like Eddie Murphy in 48 Hours, Winfrey has immediately established herself as a force to be reckoned with.

The Color Purple is like a deep, dark sea. On the surface, things are fairly placid. There is violence, pain, heart-wrenching loneliness, and humor, but all are subtly presented.

However, these forces are obviously at work, and like a strong current or undertow, they slowly, inevitably drag the viewer under, until he is submerged and overwhelmed by The Color Purple. It will move you in quiet and strange ways, like no other movie this year.

Twice In A Lifetime is one of the most realistic films this year. It has a knock-out cast headed by Gene Hackman and Ann-Margaret, and features Ally Sheedy.

The story deals with the divorce and painful aftermath of Harry (Hackman) and Kate (Ellen Burstyn). It compares favorably to other recent dramas such as Terms Of Endearment and Ordinary People, which appealed to the oft-ignored movie-goer over age 17.

Twice In A Lifetime is thoroughly engrossing from start to finish, and contains a bravura performance by Amy Madigan as Sonny, the daughter who can't forgive her father. Not much publicity has surrounded this movie, but it just might turn into the sleeper hit of the new year.

One film that has been greeted with a great deal of publicity is Akira Kurosawa's Ran, a three-hour Japanese film that is loosely based on Shakespeare's King Lear. The familiar story tells of Lord Hidetora, an aging warrior who, wishing to live his life in peace, decides to divide his kingdom into equal parts for his three sons.

Only one has the courage to question his plan, and for his 'frankness he is banished.

The other two sons squabble among themselves, and spurn their father, who lapses into madness rather than face his disastrous mistake. Complicating matters is Lady Kaede, a tough woman who wants to take revenge for her family, who was defeated by Lord Hidetora long ago. This film is above criticism, for it is undeniably a towering achievement.





Though not a great film A Chorus Line is also worth seeing. The dancing is top-notch and the ensemble cast is captivating. Furthermore, once becoming emotionally involved with these characters, which quickly happens, movie-goers get a great feeling for what it is like to audition, along with a thousand other people, for a few spots on a chorus line.

Though the two new songs written especially for the film are too long and unnecessary, it is refreshing to hear

music that has some connection to the action, rather than the plug-in pop music that pervades most movies today.

Another refreshing surprise is Enemy Mine, a movie with a terrible title. It brings to mind war and violence, while the movie is chiefly about friendship and love. It tells of two natural enemies, an Earthling (Dennis Quaid) and a Drak (Louis Gossett Jr.), who are stranded on a hostile planet and must work together to survive.

This is only the set-up, for the script takes numerous unexpected twists which really make this movie a delight. It has two wonderful performances, a good dose of humor, some heart-warming moments, and an exciting finish. In fact, Enemy Mine is the perfect family film that arrived just in time for Christmas, but was left under the tree, unopened and unseen. And that's a shame.

Despite the good storyline news, these films are having a rough time at the box office. Both A Chorus Line and Enemy Mine have opened weakly; but they have both generated good word-of-mouth and might conceivably gain a wide following in the coming weeks.

Another underappreciated film is Clue, which received many undeserved poor reviews. Peppered with one-liners and slap-stick humor, Clue takes off because of its great cast. Among others, it includes Christopher Lloyd, Martin Mull, Madeline Kahn, and Lesley Ann Warren. Admittedly, this is a very silly movie, but if you're in the right frame of mind, it can be hilarious.

At this point, the only clear losers are Young Sherlock Holmes, taking in \$11 million after a month in wide release, Clue, collecting \$7 million, and the two movies with Christmas themes, One Magic Christmas (\$13 million) and Santa Claus: The Movie (\$22 million). Neither of these Christmas movies have done any business since Christmas Day, and their only hope is that reissues in the coming years will prove equally profitable.