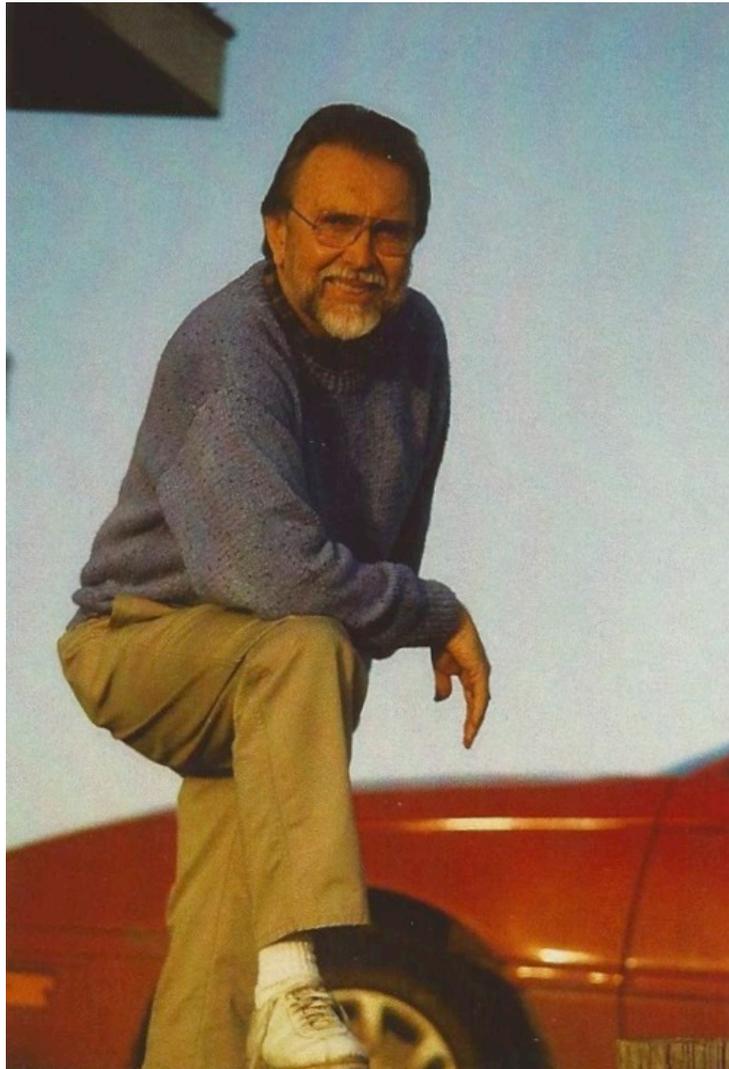


CRAWFORD: THE YOOPER CRITIC



(from page 213, "Past Light" Memoir)

"One of the things I began to do in 2011 was write succinct film reviews of movies I saw, usually via Netflix (very poor cinema in Marquette—just one complex which only shows the popular stuff). I use the pen name of "Yooper Critic" and thrust these upon many of my email contacts. The friends have the privilege of reading or deleting. It is fun when someone disagrees and fires back at me. Very few respond and none are expected to do so. . . . Jon Bailiff is another person who challenges my reviews at times - fun!"

[From Gagliano: As you can see from the statement above, these riffs were originally meant for Jerry’s mailing list only. But I convinced Jerry to let me include some of them on this link, because they so directly illustrate his intense love of performance and dramatic writing. I don’t know how his other friends view his Yooper reviews, but I look forward to them. In one instance (Jerry’s review of *A Late Quartet* — see below), this indie film — that came and went quickly in general theatre release — was immediately released on DVD. Jerry reviewed the DVD with such positive excitement that I bought the DVD and agreed with Jerry’s appraisal. While the majority of Jerry’s reviews — (more like thumbnail critique-riffs for friends, expressing Jerry’s prejudices, asides, loves *and* expertise, of course, *and all* in his —well—Crawford voice) — *are* of films, Jerry will often detour to other forms. Jerry starts off this Yooper page with a chatty riff on highlights from a New York City trip in 2012, viewing theatre, museums and one film.]

Wed, Mar 7, 2012: The Yooper Critic Sees 7 Plays and 1 Film in NYC

1. SEMINAR by Theresa Rebeck, starring Alan Rickman



SEMINAR is a non-stop comedy, with some serious views offered about an aging professor of fiction writing and 4 of his special students, who pay five grand each to see him with the group once a week. Two excellent sets (the second one a late surprise) by David Zinn, who also did first-rate costumes. Fine lighting by Ben Stanton and a great music score between the fairly episodic scenes by John Gromada. Rickman is perfection and would be my choice as Best Actor in a Play. The four students are Pettienne Park (sexy and bright Asian), Hannish Linklater (yes, daughter of Kristin), Lily Rabe (yes, daughter of David), and Jerry O'Connell. While a fabulous ensemble, I could not but note that I know two actresses and one actor in NY right now who would have nailed the roles played by the children of stars. In other words, the truism holds: in theatre, it is mostly WHO you know that advances you — who you are **AND** how you connect with the company or director or author or whomever. Connections and interviews pay off in NY, not auditions. The play is rife with sharp dialogue and serious insights into people, especially writers. I loved it. I would make it the Tony Winning Play but *OTHER DESERT CITIES* has a lot of hype — Julie Jensen saw it and found it manipulative and I rarely disagree with Julie — thus, I passed on it on this visit.

2. **VENUS IN FUR:** Obviously, I prefer plays to musicals and I found this, as Julie did, the best thing David Ives has ever written.



It is a dark, dark comedy that starts and ends with a thunder clap and a scary final curtain. The real star of this event is the fabulous actress, Nina Arianda (recently of NYU). A six foot beauty who literally throws her body, voice, and emotions all over the walls and floor is remarkable. Best actress in a play for me. Hugh Dancy barely holds his own against the powerhouse. However, as a duo, they do work, though she clearly makes him better. Wicked dialogue and a great premise: end of an auditioning day for a playwright/director, a late arrival bursts in and finagles a reading, even coaxing him into reading with her. She is ULTRA-contemporary, bright, seemingly ditzy, and, once reading the 19th Century role under question, becomes a transformational talent. Swearing like a Marine as herself, she becomes utterly classical and overwhelms the writer/director in every possible way. Loved it.



Sutton Foster

3. Surprise! A musical is my third choice, *ANYTHING GOES*....maybe because it had music by the incomparable Cole Porter, and written by P.G. Wodehouse, Guy Bolton, Howard Lindsay & Russel Crouse (new version by Timothy Crouse and John Weidman, the latter also with my NY agent) in the year of my birth (1934), I loved it. Primarily I loved it because of its

sensational super-star, Sutton Foster. No wonder she won Best Actress in a Musical in this last year (and leaves the show for a TV series soon). This woman can act, sing, dance with ANY of the greats. We were privileged with a talk-back with her after the show (she is an old LES MIZ buddy of son-in-law, Paul Truckey, and he and I had 18 students with us). I told her I thought she ranked with Gwen Verdon whom I saw in DAMN YANKEES in 1956, Ethel Merman, Liza Minnelli and other such stars over the years. Besides her six foot talent (the great ones this trip were six footers), she is a hell of a nice person. As is Joel Grey, who also came out after to chat with us. This is an old fashioned musical, very unlike almost anything written now. Simple but clear story with stunning sets by Derek McLane, great costumes by Martin Pakledman, and the usual fine lighting and sound. The place was packed. (Both SEMINAR and VENUS IN FUR were full, too, though I got a TKTS half price on the latter.) I loved this one, too.

*By the way, prices are outrageous. **BOOK OF MORMAN** was \$150....plays were \$135....at TKTS I got **VENUS, HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE**, and, **SEMINAR**....forty-some for the first two and sixty some for the latter. Crowds and crowds....where is the economic crunch on Broadway or Off????*

*4. I had never seen the grim, **HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE**, by colleague Fellow of ATF, playwright Paula Vogel.*



*I saw **HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE** with a full house Off Broadway and it was riveting. Norbert Leo Butz is sensational, and Elizabeth Reaser was his fine foil, replete with the bust that is vital to the text! Three excellent supporting people handled well all three Greek Chorus demands. Kate Whoriskey directed hell out of this tragic piece in which an extremely likable uncle sexually abuses his eleven year old niece and continues to do so for years. Derek McLane also did this simple, fine set with the old, pink Cadillac upstage.*

Jenny Mannis did great costumes and all the design artists were splendid. This play is dark, dark, dark, YET, marvelously interpolated with organic humor. Amazing. It deserved all its awards. And Paula says this revival may be better than the original. Glad I saw it even though one watches a good man destroy himself with his monster interior and his niece become damaged for life.

5. PORGY AND BESS is more opera than Musical Theatre and this production is sterling; one cannot see this thing but every generation or so because it demands an array of spectacular black talent that sing well enough to reach the moon. The four Tony Award winning star, Audra McDonald, is all they say she is---unbelievable in voice and acting power. This kid from Fresno where she worked once with Terry Miller's late wife, Nancy, is so powerful she knocks you out of your seat. Wow; she is matched by Norm Lewis as Porgy! Any actor who does the latter role ends up as crippled as the character.



Lewis almost deforms his leg permanently and also reaches the moon with his voice. Then David Allan Grier does a "Sporting Life" character to match the other two. All three should win Tonys this year. The entire company is just stunning. Of course, the house was only about 80% full and most were white. It is a limited engagement. Simply not to be missed because George and Ira Gershwin are gone, as is DuBose and Dorothy Heyward. However, Suzan-Lori Parks and Diedre L. Murray have adapted it quite well, albeit I tend to align with Stephen Sondheim who objected to any adaptation of this once-in-a-lifetime work. Even as I so align, I admit it was a long enough evening with the adaptation and the original would have been considerably longer.

6. THE BOOK OF MORMAN: *This outrageous and wonderful satire of the Mormons is clever and brilliantly done. The writers, director, actors are largely unknown and talented. This thing could run forever. I laughed and laughed, especially when Jesus Christ comes down stage and says to a guy, "You're a dick." The scene with all the Africans running around with three foot, black, phallus devices, poking people at all angles as they sing and dance, either sends you out of the theatre or into tearful laughter. Our students were gaga about this, of course. I liked it, but, did find myself exhausted well before it ended. I only wish it could be done at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. (Never happen.)*

7. Finally, WAR HORSE, *last year's Tony for Best Play. No idea how that could be when it is a fairly trite, predictable, sentimental piece. ON THE OTHER HAND, who could not love those puppet horses? Wow. They actually seem real even with the two or three humans clearly operating them. The lead boy who loses his horse only to search for him throughout WWI was awful. One note shout throughout. Our actor, Joe, from Northern Michigan University, still struggling after 8 years in the city, would have nailed the role. There is no justice in theatre and casting, of course. It is all connections and luck. Way it goes. The goose puppet was my personal favorite and the huge company of actors behaving as stage hands need commendations. Michael Morpurgo wrote the piece and Nick Stafford adapted it; Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris directed--they deserve kudos as it is magnificently staged with great projections and music; Handspring Puppet Company gets a lot of credit, as does the director of the horse movements, Toby Sedgewick. David Lansbary and Nat McIntyre did roles*

as German soldiers that impressed me the most. The Brits were ok, save that lead boy, Andrew Durand, whom I really disliked. Well worth seeing if only for the spectacle. Reminded me a bit of Las Vegas.



Film: PINA.

I subway'd to the Village just beneath NYU to see this German film about the remarkable choreographer, Pina Bausch, who died too young but left a great Dance Company. Julie Jensen put me on to this film and I am very glad I saw it.

Julie found it so unique at expressing the inexpressible, it was life-changing for her. Like me, Julie is devoted to words. This film is articulate without words. The dances are so original, although I agree with Julie that the film itself is pedestrian, even chunky or uninspired, as Julie puts it. Even so, the content, focused on Pina and the stunning dances themselves, are awesome. The most moving piece to me was a segment when young dancers just stood in a line only to be quickly replaced with very old actors in the same costumes....back and forth. Talk about the lesson of life moving by fast. Sigh.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS: *long walk in Central Park with Paul and grandson, Kolby; most of a day at MOMA with Kolby relishing Monet's Water Lillies,*

*Van Gogh's Starry Night, Seurat, Pollack, and Picasso. Great dining at Becco's on Restaurant Row. A pretzel, a hotdog from the street vendors. Knowing from my four years in NY and many visits where one goes to find a clean, open, free toilet in Times Square (it is the second floor of the Marriott/Marquis Hotel/Theatre complex)....or the old Edison Cafe, though you must borrow their door key. The Edison lobby still has lots of easy chairs for relaxing downtown. At age 77, I was plenty tired, but, all the walking kept the weight down despite the fact I ate more than at home and did no sugar monitoring. Upon return, I was the exact weight as when I left, 178, and, sugar counts slightly up but ok. One bad blister for walking in the Park in loafers. I know better, but.....--A great trip. Oh, one thing: New Yorkers were uniformly friendly and helpful. Not like back in the day when the city was dirtier and the people very abrupt. Not so now. Very nice. As for flying; well, you know. Just a painful, long, ugly experience now. Sad. **Will I try to return to The Big Apple? Of course, if I live! It remains the center of potent theatre, fine films, great food, and an excitement/ rhythm unmatched. If one is of the theatre, it regenerates and inspires.***

FILM REVIEWS

Yooper Critic sees the new film ANNA KARENINA



Playwright Tom Stoppard

Pretty people. Pretty design. Pretty costumes. Tolstoy masterpiece of intense passion defying a Victorian, late 19th Century world and the price paid for it. A modern psychologist would note that overwhelming intensity is not love, but, Tolstoy told one of the great romances, label it as you will. Hell of a story, hell of a fine group of characters. This new version by the great Tom Stoppard, directed by usually solid, standard classic director Joe Wright, is a stylistic challenge. Perhaps to frame the artifice of the mores and morality of the time, Stoppard and Wright frame the story as though a group of actors were preparing a stage production, replete with a curtain and other stage equipment on display. Is this a Brechtian version? It looks more like a Faberge egg. Toss in moments of selective realism and even down-and-sexy-dirty naturalism and the piece becomes what it is — a hodgepodge of stunning theatricality. If Brecht is all distance and strangeness, the Faberge egg is full of intimate, even sticky confections. The realism/naturalism comes from most of the acting; Keira Knightley, she of the lovely face with its thrusting chin, oozes mindless intensity, desire, need, passion. Jude Law, on the other hand, caught in the role of the cold husband, is almost a robot in expressing anything. The object of Anna's imperative is almost a silly, blue eyed blonde who kills his grand horse in that race, this time stumbling off a stage in the process! And Anna flips out at that accident, revealing her true feelings to husband and the world. They will punish her severely for those unbridled feelings. And, a theatre full of patrons turns their back on her.

All sorts of recent featured actors and actresses from popular cable series shows sprinkle through the cast. From DOWNTON ABBEY to BOARDWALK EMPIRE to THE BORGHIAS, a lot of alluring beauty and talent grace the screen, including Kelly MacDonald and Emily Watson, to name but two. Perhaps the real stars of this movie (beyond the dominant Stoppard and Wright) are Jacquiline Durran and Sarah Greenwald, costumer and designer. Tis a feast for the eyes. Does it all add up to over two spellbinding hours? Nope. About fifteen minutes in, I actually turned to my dog, Foo Foo, and said out loud, "Foo, this is boring." About then, some bit in the film would recapture me and Foo. . . .My favorite thing? The ice bound trains. The worst? Anna diving under the train--what in hell WAS that? . . . Want Tolstoy and his power? Read the novel again, or, if

not, certainly for the first time. Want a ride on an ice train without much warmth and heart (thank you, Bertolt), jump on board.

2 1/2 YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5

Yooper Critic on “A Late Quartet.”



Comes, on rare occasion, an exquisite film. Perhaps you are not interested in how professional artists work. This film by Yaron Zillerman and a remarkable cast of actors reveal how professional artists work. In this instance, a string quartet. I know little about string quartets; however, I do know that Beethoven wrote perhaps the most moving and difficult one of all time, String Quartet No. 14 Op. 131. There is a finality to this music, not quite funereal, but, dark and awesome. It requires segments of such speed, violins and cellos are pushed to the limit along with their players. The piece is to be played without pause through all 7 movements--rare, if not nearly impossible, save for the finest of musicians. (Much of the music in the film was played by the famed Brentano Quartet.) How Zillerman and Philip Seymour Hoffman, Christopher Walken, Catherine Keener, and Mark Ivanir to appear to actually be playing those instruments is a feat in itself. Young Imogen Poots is only a step behind them.

Before you think this is somewhat like a documentary, think again. There is a rich, multi-layered, complex plot behind the music which makes this one

of the unheralded, great films I've seen recently. (Naturally, the commercial aspects of Hollywood largely ignored the film. However, what could have remained a soap opera level, melodramatic story rises above to believable drama with Zillerman's and Seth Grossman's quite complex writing and, of course, superb acting.) The lives of the lead characters are intricately intertwined to a dangerous degree; the film explores those lives with emotive impact. Walken is particularly powerful by avoiding certain mannerisms developed over years of acting. Walken returns to the roots of his great talent — see DEER HUNTER — to create an especially intelligent, moving character. Hoffman is unique at revealing the frustrations of a great musician tagged for 25 years in a secondary position when he knows he is or should be first in rank. The other actors are excellent without exception. If you cannot be deeply moved by the ending of this film, you cannot be moved. Also, I thought the ending would be predictable and it was not. I was asked once what it was like to be a writer, an artist of one sort or another. I replied that I was never enough of one to really know but I referred them to Sondheim's immortal play with music, SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE. I would now add this film to the reference.

5 YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5

May 15, 2013 (HITCHCOCK)



I never quite got Hitchcock. VERTIGO now considered the best picture of all time over CITIZEN CANE? (I never got that one either.) Hitchcock never won an Oscar. Most of his films were melodramatic to a fault, even in their day. Watch PSYCHO now. A few moments work; a few decent actors; direction and cutting dominate. Marty Balsam's talent was wasted as was that of Vera Miles. John Gavin? Sigh. The ugly coda at the end explaining pathetic psychology is laughable, even in 1960! (I was working on my PhD at The U. of Iowa.)

This 2013 film version, directed overtly by Sacha Gervasi, proves it was the cutting and those shrieks over the murder that created the wild popularity of the original, plus the shocking fact Janet Leigh was killed off so early in the film. Anthony Perkins was the best thing in the original and James D'Arcy's portrayal of him in the Gervasi film is almost the best thing in this odd one, though Helen Mirren's Alma, wife of the director, probably gets that nod. Anthony Hopkins wears a great fat suit as Alfred and prosthetic makeup that immobilizes his face in an imitative cartoon, far removed from his genuine talent. Scarlett Johansson is not as effective as Leigh, but, just as perky and sexy. The most believable role in this film is by Michael Wincott who plays the ghost of the Wisconsin serial killer who was the life model for the Bates killer played by Perkins in the original. Wincott was scary. However, the use of this hallucinatory character by writer John J. McLaughlin is distracting to the form, style and structure of this strange movie. If one sees it expecting an inside view of the filming of PSYCHO, it only succeeds in making Hitchcock seem psycho himself. If one sees it expecting an inside view of a sexless, business-like marriage, it comes closer only to cop out at the end to sentimentality. One segment in this film made me laugh out loud---at the first audience performance, Hitchcock listens from a hall as the famous shower scene slaughter occurs and CONDUCTS THE ACTION IN MIME LIKE A CRAZED CONDUCTOR.

However, I stopped laughing when I realized today's convicted Arizona murderess, Jodi Arias, slaughtered Travis Alexander in a shower in much the same manner. Brrrrrr.

If YOU "got" Hitchcock, go ahead and see this peculiar movie. (Did I like any of the famed thrill director's work? Yes, STRANGERS ON A TRAIN.

Robert Walker was first rate in that one and Hitchcock's only daughter dies well in a bit role. And Ruth Roman was a favorite. Even Farley Granger was ok.) LIFEBOAT was solid, REAR WINDOW was fun, as was NORTH BY NORTHWEST until they got to Mt. Rushmore. 39 STEPS showed his promise and TO CATCH A THIEF had a top romantic pair in Grant and Kelly. THE BIRDS and VERTIGO did nothing for me. Nada.

Along with the recent, uneven television film about Hitchcock's obsession with Tippi Hedren and blondes, we have had enough biographical films of this man. Or WAS he more cartoon than real man, as his TV series accentuated? Oh, one great talent: his amusing appearances for a few seconds in each of his films.

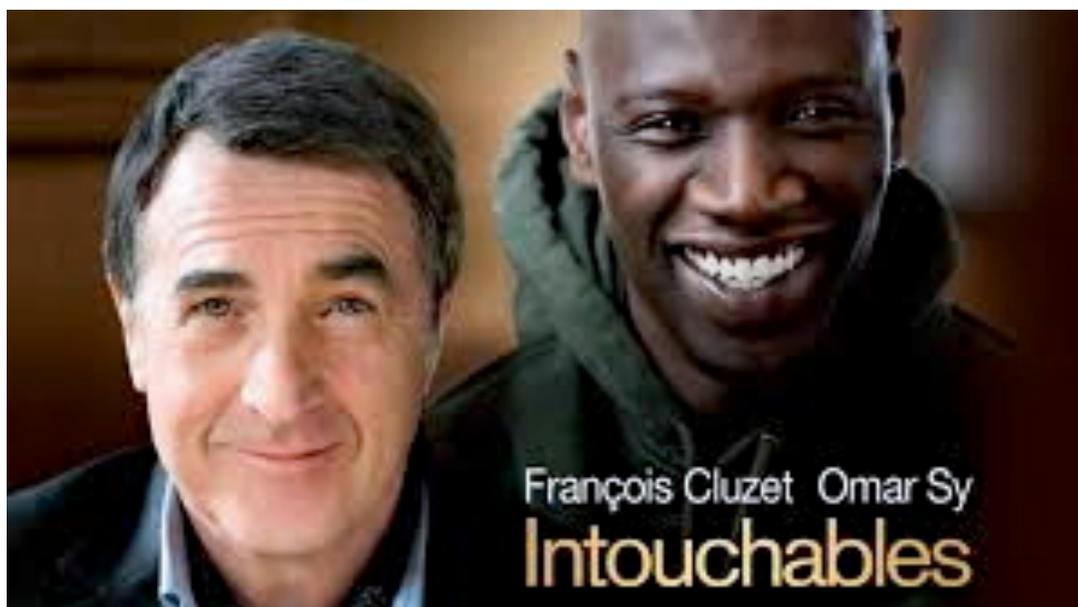
1 1/2 YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5

*A CRAWFORD YOOPER
23 April 2013*

Back from a fine time in D.C., after hideous travel issues, home by the fire as snow STILL falls. There is no spring.

THE INTOUCHABLES

This 2012 film is well worth your seeing because it is simply such a pleasurable viewing experience. This fact is due more to the superb acting than the script/direction, albeit writer Olivier Nakache and director Eric Toledano execute their story well enough.



Actors Francois Cluzet and Omar Sy simply rise above any occasional cliché or fantasy dealing with the art of care giving to make the viewer feel damn good. Cluzet is in line with John Hawkes and his marvelous performance in SESSIONS of a man paralyzed by polio. Here, Cluzet only has feeling from his neck up (a comic segment reveals he can experience eroticism by having a lovely lady rub his ears). Cluzet's character was paralyzed in a gliding mishap. Perhaps an even greater performance is managed by his care giver, played by Sy. As a survivor of his African roots, Sy is a low level criminal in Paris who stumbles into being hired to care for Cluzet. Care giving is uniquely challenging because one rather has to become the patient in order to handle all needs well, but, remain active and pleasant to do the tougher job---keeping the patient reasonably happy and willing to live on. Sy is simply irresistible. A dynamo role is played by a dynamo talent. A highlight is when he shows Cluzet AND a classical string orchestra how to dance to Wind, Earth, and Fire. Pure joy. All ends perhaps too well, but, guess what? It is a TRUE story WITH a real happy ending. Go figure. See this for simply rich, warm movie watching and splendid acting,

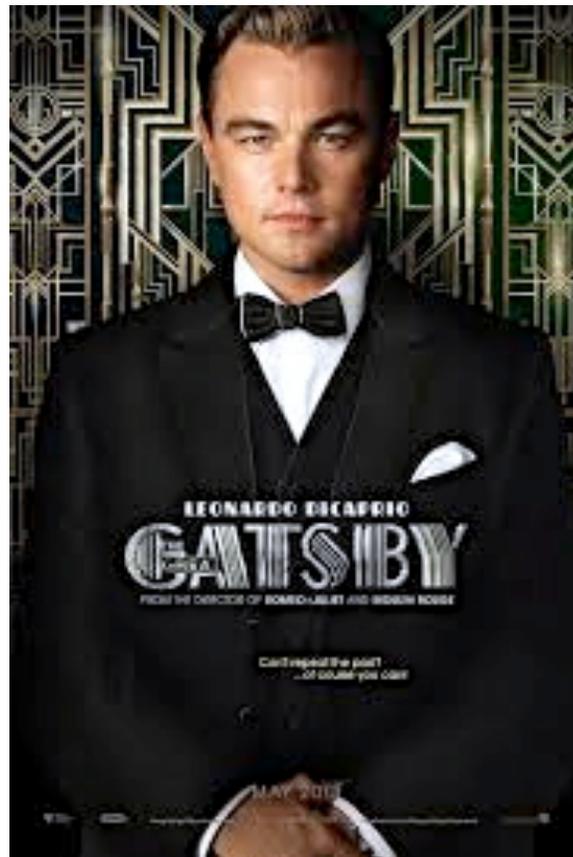
Good to be back, even with a bad head cold. And it is not just the U.P. resisting spring....the weather is a mess most places. Of course, this has NOTHING to do with Global Warming.

4 YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5

YOOPER CRITIC sees the new GREAT GATSBY

Robert Redford and Mia Farrow left me cold; no dynamic or empathy managed by those pretty actors in that effort in the '70's. Leonardo DiCaprio and Carey Mulligan are even prettier but only Ms. Mulligan's Daisy garners any empathy--sadly, that is gone by the time she hits the road, albeit it was high time. The most empathic character in Baz Luhrmann's opulent new 2D and 3D (ugh) versions is Tobey Maguire's Nick. One expects Joel Edgerton to be despicable as Daisy's husband, and he is, but, I had high hopes DiCaprio might deposit some charisma into Jay Gatsby's character to offset his despicable side---hopes vanquished.

He is indeed a handsome huckster/bootlegger, gangster, and far more active/dynamic in his interpretation than Redford (who floated through the role as a one dimensional portrait). DiCaprio often seemed just this side of madness which gave the role an unfortunate twist. His dramatization of the foolishness of idealized love, one of several major themes in the masterpiece novel, comes off whacked, not ideal.

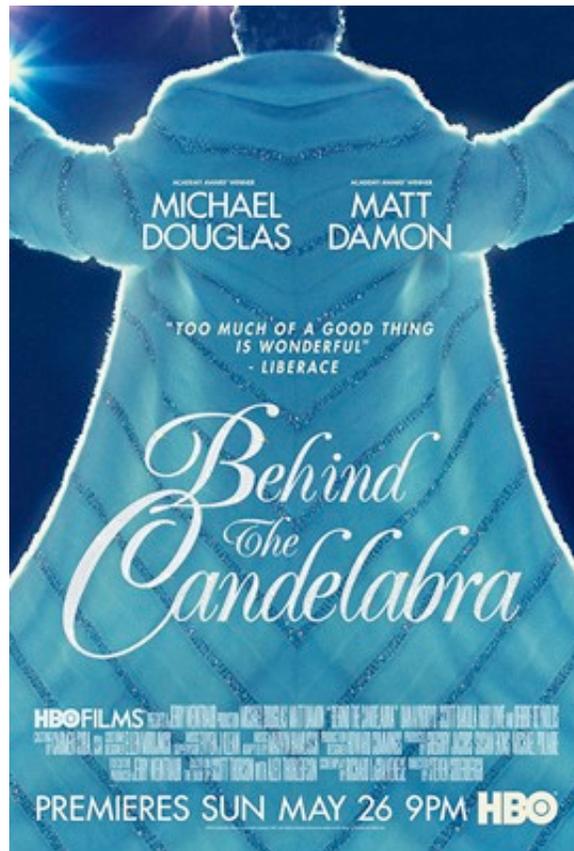


Here director Luhrmann needed to be an acting coach, a task clearly beyond him. Luhrmann's focus is almost entirely on spectacle, including contemporary hip music and artists---way out of line with the roaring 1920's being depicted. As for DiCaprio, perhaps the role is simply beyond any actor, although I would have loved to see Daniel Day Lewis have a go at it. Perhaps directed by a compatriot actor (Dustin Hoffman, for example). The main theme of the book is not focused on the love story as much as it is on the death of the American dream, or, a declining nation wallowing in greed, materialism, booze, and sex. This version does capture the hollowness of the upper class which manages at times to even corrupt poor Nick. Maguire is best at fidelity to FitzGerald, just as Sam Waterson was in the

Redford film. In a lesser role, I think Scotty Wilson's dumb mechanic proved a more empathic killer of Gatsby than the current one. Luhrmann and co-writer, Craig Pearce, make several odd changes to the great story, including having Nick narrate from a Sanatorium as well as write the book itself under his name. Luhrmann also overlooks the actual connection between Nick and Jordan, eliminates racism and antisemitism (having an East Indian play the Jewish mobster is simply absurd). Luhrmann gives Gatsby a far more theatrical, "staged" first appearance than any of the former films on the subject, kills him at the side of the pool for a spectacular backward collapse into water, and foregoes the floating raft. Finally, here Gatsby dies believing he is a winner and that Daisy is making the phone call he hears as he dies. The call is from Nick. To this old, biased viewer and admirer of Fitzgerald (far better novelist than Hemingway in my book), the worst thing here is that the most probing character issue of the novel is mentioned but not plumbed or dramatized. Namely, the key issue in being a human being is having to see things from the inside and outside at the same time. Oh, my, as a playwright, I certainly understand that one. So does any good actor and director. However, most people have no clue as to what that means. While FitzGerald's Gatsby never fully unlocks that mystery, he does personify it. Neither Redford or DiCaprio manage as much, although the fault may lie primarily with director Luhrmann who is intrigued by operatic opulence, party scenes, and crazed behavior brought on by money, booze, and lust.

Luhrman is talented---see MOULIN ROUGE! or his ROMEO AND JULIET with DiCaprio. The clue to him may be that he has also done opera, such as, Puccini's LA BOHEME. THE GREAT GATSBY is more comic and melodramatic opera than dark comedy or tragedy, forms which dominate the novel and are once again diminished in film. However, it is a spirited and spectacular effort worth seeing, but, hard to cherish without depth and heart. 2 YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5

May 28, 2013 at 5:32 PM: Yooper Critic sees "BEHIND THE CANDELABRA," Starring Michael Douglas and Matt Damon



Anecdotes first: in Las Vegas back in the day, Pat and I lived only a few blocks from one of the Liberace homes. My mother joined millions of other dowagers who adored this extravagant queen who COULD play the piano; so Pat and I went to see his show at the Riviera. His warmup opener was a new singer billed, Barbra Streisand. She came out in an ugly dress that looked like a table cloth off one of those 1970 kitchen tables. She crawled up on a stool and sang, "Coloring Book." We were knocked out. Even so, Liberace was quite entertaining--but this was before he started coming on stage in a Rolls Royce with a boy doll as driver.

After the show, Pat and I went to Mr. Sy's news stand for something and young Barbra was there, scrunched down by the magazine rack exploring "Better Homes & Gardens." Her panties showed over the back of her jeans and Pat giggled---there was a hole in them. Imagine Barbra with such a hole now. No way. A few years later, after the Liberace Museum opened on Tropicana next to his restaurant, Tivoli Gardens, we went to breakfast there one Sunday---Liberace was hosting some scary types, looking exactly like a wax museum artifact. Yes, all in white and glitters, even in his hair and over his eyes. Very scary.

Enough. To the film directed by Steven Soderbergh, he of solid credits, who says this is his finale. Perhaps that is best. Not that the actors are not courageous (foolish?) and gifted; Michael Douglas and Matt Damon will likely both win awards. Hell, so might Rob Lowe and Debbie Reynolds. The latter two are almost unrecognizable. Actually, Reynolds IS unrecognizable. The real artist at work in this odd film has to be the make-up artist. Faces and bodies are done over more than once! Wow. Next, award the scenic designer. Oh, those houses, bedrooms and baths! Then the costume designer. Well, you have seen them! These film artists capture the entire, mad scene, Lowe doing the weird cosmetic surgeon and drug distributor who redid Lee Liberace's face/body many times and did the young lover, Thorson, too, trying to make him look like Liberace's son. Poor Lee always wanted a son. Ahem. I must cease being sarcastic, if that is what I am doing. The film seems faithful to frantically homosexual Liberace and his main lover, Thorson, who later sued for a paternity suit (he was in the will. He is now in jail, by the way.) It was more than a legal mess, it was a moral mess on several levels. One can be as liberal and free minded as possible and still be a bit taken aback by all the crazed kissing/fondling between Douglas and Damon. Professional craftsmen for sure. Also, for a raving old heterosexual like me, not really comfortable watching them. (How's that for a sad, politically incorrect admission? Sigh.) I mean, was the movie about anything else except their homosexuality? Of course. That is truly what defined them--not the music, not the spectacle. The film also reveals how insidious greed and success in America can run amuck; the clothing, cars, houses, furnishings---ghastly bling. And, yes, hilarious. In fact, the best part of this film is the fairly frequent humor; I found myself wishing they had gone totally camp, and, trust me, they are constantly on that edge. During filming, Lowe is to have said once: "Our careers and lives will be ruined by this thing." To the contrary, it was a hit at Cannes and reviews are coming forth raving about the performances. The script is thin at best, but, all in all, it appears to be well directed. Soderbergh wrote the thing with Richard LaGravenese---- both solid writers and Hollywood talents. The script turns very melodramatic at times because they indeed lived their lives as melodrama (and farce). The ending will move many to tears because the death scene with Douglas (RAVISHED by AIDS) is on target. I spent part of the last day of a dear friend's death by AIDS visiting him in an AIDS Hospice in Canoga Park, California. Douglas nails the visage with remarkable help from the

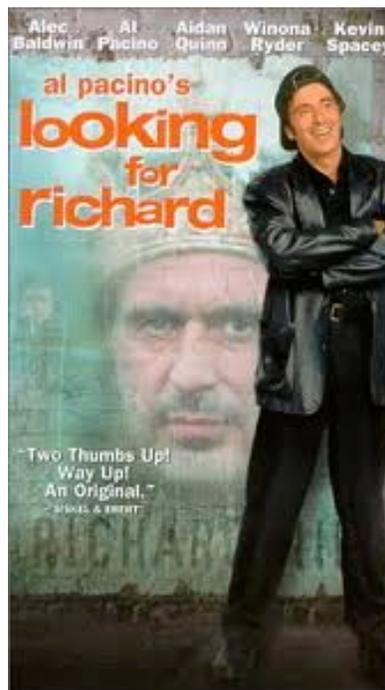
make-up artist. He is almost totally bald (he was much of his adult life and wore his wigs even to bed); he is gaunt---well, he is the exact depiction of an AIDS patient at the end. The film ends at the funeral with a kind of dream segment in which Damon as Thorson watches Liberace exit stage by flying into the heavens. Liberace actually did use flying in that fashion late in his career at Carnegie Hall. (His 56 performances there were all sell-outs.) This scene also went over the top for this old, biased viewer. The Liberace Museum and the restaurant are now gone. I believe the house near the Griffith United Methodist Church is still there. All else is lost to memory.

Liberace actually sustained the lie of his sexual nature to his endless, mostly aging female fans. He had rumors put out that he and Sonja Henie were in love. (Joe Louis and Sonja actually were!) Liberace's fans bought the lie in the face of his self-mocking gay displays because they chose to do so, my mother included. Indeed, he was one hell of an entertainer, whatever that actually means.

3 POSITIVE YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5 PRIMARILY FOR THE ACTING AGAIN; or, as a critic friend uses, 4 NEGATIVE YAWNS OUT OF 5 FOR OFTEN REDUNDANT BOREDOM

YOOPER CRITIC LOOKING FOR RICHARD

(16 July 2013) I missed this 1996 documentary done by Al Pacino. Dan Slobig reminded me about it and I had a look.



I was very entertained by the whole, strange venture. Pacino is one of those who touts the idea that Shakespeare's RICHARD III is the most produced of all the Bard plays. It is certainly the most popular History play. Shakespeare Festivals trot it out frequently; I saw it at least three times in my 15 summers at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. It was always well attended and controversial to both scholars and general theatre goers. My seminar colleague in Utah, Ace Pilkington, is an expert on the play and its various treatments. I always liked the play and its audacious villain and namesake. I find his wooing of Lady Anne the most extreme challenge to actors (and credibility) in the entire canon.

Worn out by his own successful film career, Pacino wanted to return to the stage as Richard. He also wanted to make a documentary film about doing the play. Over four years passed during all this. The result is a captivating documentary which actually stages around 1/4 of the play in costumes and in settings found in New York and London, as well as the English countryside. Director Fredric Kimball joins Pacino on every step of this double source of creativity. A key producer was Michael Hadge. He prompts another personal anecdote from Yooper. In the Utah seminar grove, Dr. Pilkington was fond of kidding me that I knew "everyone in the American theatre save a couple stage hands in New England." Well, I certainly knew Michael Hadge, an actor/producer type, about my age, who joined with New York director. Jerry Heyman, to consider producing my LBJ play, THE LAST PRESIDENT. In 1979, we had a successful staged reading in NY with backers in attendance; an Equity cast did a good job, led by Jack Hollander as LBJ. Hadge was ready to produce the play at the fine Off Broadway theatre at St. Clement's. However, after discussing actors who might play LBJ (George C. Scott, Robert Duvall, Fred Gwynn), Hadge just announced I had to cut the roles from 16 down to 6 and he would choose which 6. I balked. Hadge and Heyman walked and so did I and my agents. (The play was later done at UNLV, U. of Akron, and is currently under consideration again in N.Y.) So you see, to encounter Hadge again in LOOKING FOR RICHARD along side Pacino, I had to laugh. Way too familiar for comfort. (I was also reminded of times being around Pacino when I was in residence at The Actors Studio. Talk about fun name dropping, though Dr. Pilkington would just say, "Of course. He knows them all.")

What I liked best about the documentary was watching key scenes pulled out to actually stage (some done indoors, some outdoors, as in the final battle scene). Above all, I FINALLY saw the Lady Anne scene work believably!! Wow. What is it, less than a 10 minute courtship of a monster figure seducing a woman who has lost a father and husband to this killer and ends up passionately kissing him? Prepared to marry him! Well, Pacino and Winona Ryder made it work from deep hate to ugly passion. Impressive.

The documentary, however, is not really about showing us the great scenes (both Larry Olivier and Ian McKellen had great full length versions---I particularly liked the McKellen Neo-Nazi version, set in 1930 England). The documentary shows us how a talented ensemble of actors with lots of money behind them discover how to best act and produce Shakespeare. (MANY CURRENT SHAKESPEARE FESTIVALS IN THIS COUNTRY COULD LEARN A THING OR TWO BY WATCHING THIS DOCUMENTARY!) We also get insight into Pacino as a person and artist; he comes off very well, almost as well as having pizza with him and playwright Pete Masterson (BEST LITTLE WHOREHOUSE IN TEXAS) at an 8th Avenue pizza joint in a snow storm once upon a time. (I can hear Ace laughing.) Who were these talented actors? Oh, Al Pacino, Alec Baldwin, Penelope Allen, Kevin Spacey, Aiden Quinn, Winona Ryder, Estelle Parsons, Harris Yulin, and Kevin Conway, among many others, with clips including John Gielgud, Kenneth Branagh, Derek Jacobi, Peter Brooke, Kevin Kline, James Earl Jones, Vanessa Redgrave, Rosemary Harris, Vivica Lindfors, F. Murray Ayrhams, even our SOPRANO uncle, Dominic Chianese. Short interviews with the public on streets are also revealing and often amusing. What Pacino set out to do was overcome the complex historical names, the trepidation about seeing or reading Shakespeare, and American traditions of bias about the Bard. Pacino tries to show us that Shakespeare can connect with anyone, not just literate academics and theatre folks. (The Epilogue with Pacino talking to an academic is a bit off-putting, but, Pacino had made the case that actors should listen to ANYONE who might help grasp the material.)

Pacino is a solid Gloucester (some of his explosive mannerisms actually work for this warped character), Spacey, a bit too sardonic for Buckingham-- yet very effective when he is rejected, Allen is a stunning

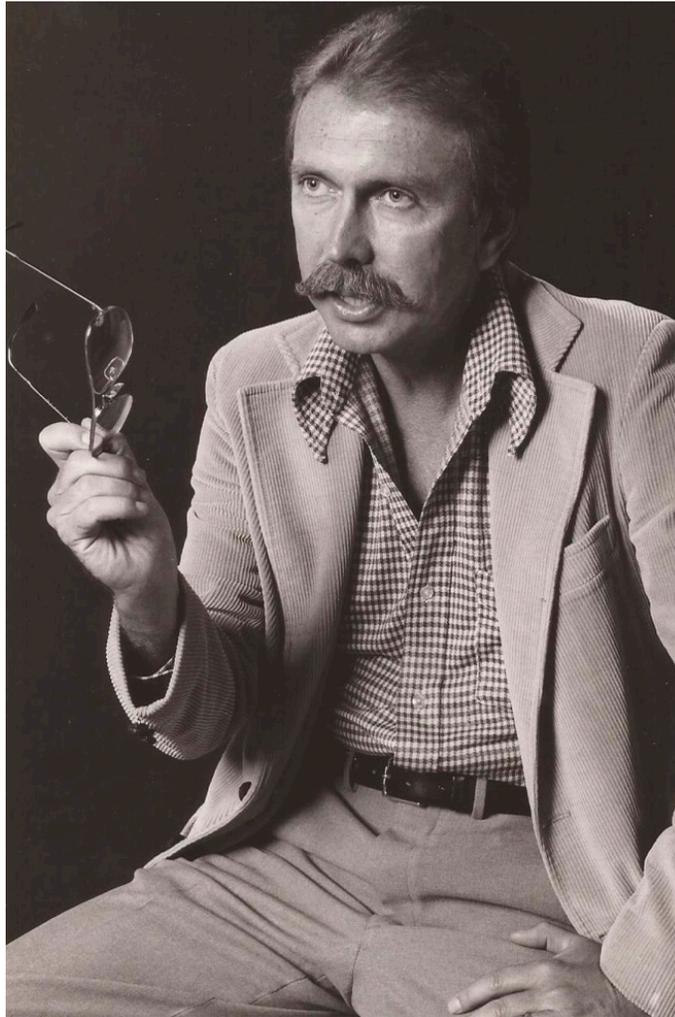
Elizabeth, Yulin is fine as the dying King Edward, Baldwin is a stunning and surprisingly fine Clarence, Conway a solid Hastings, Parsons a wild Margaret, Ryder a splendid Lady Anne (surprise, surprise). Kimball is a terrific foil for Pacino and Al shines throughout the documentary banter. One ends up admiring Pacino over many of his film counterparts who would never dare try such a bold idea (let alone even try to return to a stage to act!).



If you missed this, get it on Netflix. Especially see it if you think you don't get Shakespeare. Ignore the historical controversy over the Bard's accuracy with facts--he was a hell of a dramatist, not a historian.

5 YOU BETCHAS OUT OF 5 AND NO YAWNS

[Note From Gagliano: Keep the Yooper's coming, Jerry]



Jerry in the Before Yooper days