

All female cast to be featured in **Steel Magnolias**

By MEGAN CRAMER
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Today through Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m., the Anthony Aston Players will present *Steel Magnolias* by Robert Harling (author of the book and screenplay of *First Wives Club*). This six-woman show was based on Harling's family and friends. He was taught that men were the tough ones and women were the delicate "magnolias." Through the course of his life, however, he discovered that the women were really the ones made of steel.

This production in the Ring Theatre of Scales Fine Arts Center is directed by sophomore Drew Droege. It is the story of six women, who all meet in Truvy's hairdressing shop. Three of the characters are Truvy (senior Julie Aitcheson), the mother figure, gossipy and warm; Annelle (sophomore Tamara Payden-Travers), the newly hired assistant, who is young, but has a "past" and Ouiser (senior Katie Brewer), the character you love to hate, who enjoys being angry and upset about everything. "Each character is really individual," Aitcheson said. All of the action takes place in Truvy's shop in Chinquapin, La., and is set in the 1980's. "The play is about the nuts and bolts of life. It's not as much about the big moments as it is about the small moments," Droege said. Whether the women are dealing with a dog losing its

hair, or a daughter with diabetes, "they go through life with optimism and look to friends for support," Droege said.

Brewer enjoyed the values represented. "I really like the joy and comfort that can be found in a town where you lived your whole life. They're happy to be there," she said.

However, since many people have seen the movie, they might be surprised to see how different this production is compared to the film. Droege has encouraged the actors not to see the movie, but instead to develop their own interpretations of the characters. "The movie focused more on the tragedy. But our play seems to be more about friendship," Aitcheson said.

One of the major surprises for movie buffs is that the play's cast is just women — no men. "There are a half a dozen other characters mentioned, mostly men, but they are never seen. Our interpretations of those other characters is only through (the women's) eyes. It leaves a lot to the audience's imagination to what those characters are like," Droege said.

"I don't miss the guys at all," Payden-Travers said. As Droege pointed out, the lack of males makes provides an interesting scene for female bonding. "We see what they talk about when no men are around," he said. "Guys can come to get a sneak peek of a whole new world they've always wanted to find out about."

But even if the all-woman cast is working well together, there are other obstacles to overcome. One of these obstacles is hairdressing. Both Aitcheson and Payden-Travers have to do hair on the stage, but neither of them really had any experience with the subject before this show. This new skill, however, has been rather useful.

"I love it because I never know what to do with my



Annelle (sophomore Tamara Payden-Travers) and Truvy (senior Julie Aitcheson) act out a scene from *Steel Magnolias* set in a hair salon. The production will run in the Ring Theatre today through Sunday.

hands on stage. But with this character, I can always stick my hands in someone's hair," Aitcheson said.

The other characters are Shelby (sophomore Catherine Justice), the prettiest girl in town, optimistic and head-

strong; M'Lynn (sophomore Cecilia Pressley), Shelby's mother, the epitome of a Southern society woman; and Clairee (junior Lily Bekele), the down-to-earth, wealthy, mayor's wife.



Courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox

ID 4

This summer's blockbuster, *Independence Day*, starring Will Smith, Jeff Goldblum and Bill Pullman will be released on videocassette Friday.

Park shows nature's wonders

South Mountains State Park provides impressive sights, good fishing

By BEN SMITH
OUTDOORS COLUMNIST

When students think about where to go hiking, two places are often mentioned Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock state parks, and for good reason. Both offer beautiful, peaceful scenery within a reasonable drive from campus. Unfortunately, our strained schedules rarely allow us the time to venture much beyond Winston-Salem into the heart of the Blue Ridge. There is, however, another option for the nature-hungry, time-handicapped student — South Mountains State Park.

South Mountains State Park is located about 15 miles outside of Morganton, practically due west (on Interstate 40) of Winston-Salem. The drive takes about an hour and 45

minutes. The park itself is 5,783 acres, which is relatively large for a state park. It contains a series of low ridges, topping out at Benn Knob at just under 3,000 feet. The altitude of the mountains probably will not stun you, but the park's two major rivers, Shiny Creek (pronounced shiny) and Jacob's Fork, certainly will.

The rivers are among the most beautiful North Carolina has to offer, raucous streams furiously plunging and dodging around puny rocks and reticent boulders. The highlight of anyone's trip there will be either attempting to cross

these streams and falling harmlessly in the water (or better yet, watching someone else fall) or witnessing the beauty of High Shoal Falls.

The falls are definitely the centerpiece of the park. They are very accessible; the trail there is only about a mile long, and wooden plankwalks keep everyone safely above the stream. The falls themselves are about 80 feet tall. The gorge beyond the falls attests to the power of whatever forces created such beauty: huge truck-sized boulders are scattered carelessly about the center of Jacob's Fork, forcing the water into even more tiny falls. Oftentimes people will come lie upon the boulders, listening to the mad dash of the water. It's amazing how beautifully water's simple desire to go downward looks.

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Take it or leave it: Two different views of *Ransom*

Film doesn't live up to reputations of its stars

Movie is an example of Hollywood's best work

By JOHN E. SPITLER
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

By JOHN STANFORD
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

In general, I do not think that the public's movie-going choices are really influenced by what critics have to say about current releases.

Based on the *Ransom*'s box office numbers after two weeks, it seems like a safe bet that if you have not seen it yet, you probably will soon.

Last year, director Ron Howard made a solid leap from comedy into the real-life drama of *Apollo 13*, and star Mel Gibson stunned the world by making a crowd-pleasing epic out of *Braveheart*, picking up two Academy Awards in the bargain.

Each gained substantial respectability boosts from their 1995 smashes, and so their collaboration on *Ransom* became even more highly anticipated than it otherwise would have been.

For the record, though, I did not like *Ransom*, and just for fun, I will try to elaborate on why.

Gibson plays airline tycoon Tom Mullen, who lives a lovely rich New York life with his wife Kate (played by Rene Russo) and son Sean (Brawley Nolte). When Sean is kidnapped from a science fair, that lovely life is shattered, and Tom will do anything to get his son back ... anything but pay the kidnapers the \$2 million ransom they have demanded. But that's jumping ahead a bit.

For the first half of the film, Tom tries to play by the rules, allowing an FBI team led by agent Lonnie Hawkins (Delroy Lindo) to move in to his home and help him communicate with the kidnapers.

A bungled money drop attempt convinces Tom that the kidnapers have no intention of returning his son alive, so Tom decides to play hardball.

This leads to the scene that everyone in the theater has been waiting for since the ads for *Ransom* started airing months ago: the Special News Report, "here's your ransom, but this is as close as you're ever going to get to it" scene. I don't know if it was worth the wait, but it is one of the better scenes in the movie.

Tom offers the \$2 million as a reward on the heads of the kidnapers, much to the chagrin of the FBI and his wife, who fear that the move will get Sean killed. This latter half of the film is more compelling than the first as Tom's stubborn refusal to pay up causes tempers to flare on all sides. There are also a few clever twists in the final third of the film, but director Howard settles for a tired hero vs. villain action sequence to wrap things up.

Before criticizing *Ransom*, let me first clear this up: this is not a bad film. No aspect of it stunned me with its stupidity. On the other hand, no part of it blew me away with its inventiveness. Given the talent involved, this movie should not have to settle for being "not bad."

So what is wrong with *Ransom*? The key creative elements of the film just do not mesh together all that well.

Let's start with the film's screenplay. The story that made it to the screen is surprisingly lacking enticement even during action sequences.

Casting Gibson as the lead in any film makes solid commercial sense, but in the case of *Ransom*, Gibson's presence undermines any of the story's loftier aspirations. First, he is simply too likable to audiences. Gibson's personality and general screen persona overwhelm any efforts at creating a different character here.

I think, though, that the ultimate blame for *Ransom*'s failure to come alive should rest with Howard.

After last year's success with *Apollo 13* Opie thinks he can tackle bigger, more serious films. He is in over his head with *Ransom*. To disguise the fact that nothing of consequence is actually happening on screen, he keeps the camera moving almost constantly.

And with the exception of a few good scenes between Gibson and the chief kidnaper, Howard draws little dramatic tension from his performers. Howard's gifts as a director just don't seem to help tell this story.

As I said, *Ransom* is not a bad film. It is also not a good film. I wish I could tell you to follow Tom Mullen's lead and refuse to pay up on this particular *Ransom*, but I know it would be pointless. Go ahead and see it. Just try to think about it critically while you're watching. "Not bad" shouldn't have to be good enough.

The days of heroic astronauts in *Apollo 13* are gone for director Ron Howard, and the days of child kidnapers have arrived. Howard has abandoned his pro-America style of films to create a spectacular suspense thriller. *Ransom*, starring Mel Gibson and Gary Sinise, delves into the darker side of humanity by focusing on a brutal child kidnapping.

The plot does not stop there, though. The film also focuses on the ever-present battle between the "haves" and the "have nots" in our society. The kidnapers must fall below their own humanity to get the money that they want, and Gibson's character must reach the same level of the kidnapers to get his son back alive.

Ransom is Hollywood in its purest form; it goes back to the basics with excellent screenwriting and believable characters to produce an old-fashioned thriller. Gibson and Rene Russo's characters should seem especially familiar and vulnerable to students at the university; they play the role of the rich, ideal American family who thinks that a horrible crime such as kidnapping is below them.

While our families may not be as rich or ideal as they are, we can easily identify with their naiveté towards crime.

Gibson's character soon discovers, however, that he cannot buy his way out of this situation and that he probably will never see his son again. Ironically, he has been targeted for this crime specifically due to his ability to pay his way out of difficult situations.

This aspect is where the film receives its incredible energy; Gibson's character quickly transforms from a respected businessman into a frantic father who will do anything to get his son back.

A story is only as good as its characters, and Gibson's is an incredible one.

One aspect of the film is very perplexing: I cannot understand why the villain chooses such an incompetent group of losers as his accomplices. This vicious mastermind routinely outwits the FBI and ultimately plans to kill the kid anyway.

His partners, however, are good for little

more than comic relief. Remember that group named New Kids On the Block? Well, one of the kidnapers is played by ex-New Kid, Donnie Wahlberg (the one with the red hair). Enough said.

After seeing the film, I understand why additional kidnapers are necessary, but I cannot figure out why their characters are so thin.

The setting for this film, New York City, could not have been more perfect. The city itself becomes another character in the film, as the city that never sleeps adds the ideal amount of energy and constant stress that makes a consummate backdrop for a kidnapping.

Once the press and general public finds out about the famous tycoon's son being kidnapped, a sleeping giant awakens in the movie. Howard uses the media perfectly; at times, it enrages the audience with its lack of

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feeling and vulture-like swarming around Gibson's character.

One scene in particular exemplifies the relationship between the media and Gibson's character. The father has managed somehow to escape all but one of the media vans surrounding his house to try to save his son. As soon as he sees the parasitic van following his car, the nationally known businessman calmly steps out of his Jaguar and proceeds to smash the van's window with a tire iron.

At this point, the entire audience is clapping with approval, but ironically, Gibson turns the table on the kidnapers by using the press to his advantage.

This adept, double use of the media is just one more illustration of Ron Howard's mastery over this impressive movie. *Ransom* is an old-fashioned thriller that lives up to its hype and is definitely a must-see.

EYE ON THE ARTS

■ Dancers to perform

Local guest artists will join the 16-member university dance company for a dance concert at 8 p.m. today through Saturday at the Mainstage Theatre in the Scales Fine Arts Center.

The program will feature works choreographed by several faculty and guest artists including "Take Five," a new piece by the dance company's director, Nina Lucas.

Five dance selections will feature the university Dance Company. "Napoli," a traditional ballet piece, was staged by former American Ballet Dance Theatre member Franchon Cordell.

Three students — sophomore Michelle Hallor, junior Ann Horsley and junior Aurora Smith — have solo parts in the piece.

"Spaces," a modern dance work choreographed by Diane Markham, the assistant dean of the North Carolina School of the Arts, will highlight four university dancers.

The program will conclude with a modern dance piece by Ronen Koresch, a teacher at Philadelphia's University of the Arts.

Admission is \$10 for the general public, \$5 for students. For more information, call Ext. 5294.

■ Art to be exhibited

A painting exhibition entitled "Interpretations of Light" will be open from 5 - 6 p.m. in the west study room of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library Friday.

There are 12 artists featured in the display. They are seniors Amy Bumgardner, Jennifer Henderson, Lorin Hord, Terry Tracey and Tammy Wells;

Juniors Elizabeth Gray, Cassie Jo Howell, Kevin O'Brien, Kevin Palme and Jesse Wilbur;

Sophomores Lindsay Coleman and Russell Scott.

Admission is free and is open to the general public.

