

Arts & Entertainment

Three Films With WF Snippets Will be Shown at Rialto Theater

WESTFIELD — Diverse parts of the Town of Westfield have been the backdrop for *Just Add Pepper* by Peter Paul Basler, *Catching Fire* by William McMeekan, Jr. and *RAVE'n* by Kenn Waddell.

The Westfield natives will present their films at the Rialto Theater in Westfield during September in "Westfilm 2002: Films by Westfield Filmmakers."

Writer-director Basler will bring his romantic comedy to the screen on Monday, September 9, at 7:30 p.m. *Just Add Pepper* was also filmed in other local towns, with snippets from Westfield and the Rialto.

For a sneak preview of Basler's film, please visit www.justaddpepper.com or read the April 11, 2002 interview with the filmmaker by *Leader/Times* Correspondent Kerrienne Spellman Cort at www.goleader.com.

The lives of Westfield's firefighters are exposed in McMeekan's *Catching Fire*, which will appear at the Rialto on Monday, September 16, at 7 p.m.

The winner of "Best Government Profile," by 2002 Hometown Video Festival, *Catching Fire's* filmmaker was interviewed by *The Leader/Times* in 2002.

Finally, Waddell will present his tale of a rocker playing his last gig in a Hoboken bar. With scenes captured at the Rialto, Waddell's story will hit the screen on September 16 at 8:30 p.m.

Just Add Pepper, which has not been rated, contains some coarse language and brief sexuality. *RAVE'n* also contains strong language, with brief nudity and drug use.



A scene from Kenn Waddell's *RAVE'n*

For more information, please contact the Rialto at (908) 232-1288.

Pen & Ink Last Word

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Another NEA project, "Redirecting Thoughts," tells students to construct a stop sign. On the back, they use a white crayon to list some of their uncomfortable feelings or memories which might arise when thinking about 9/11. This will not encourage the child to deal with their emotions, but to repress them through a construction paper form of redirection. I think that from now on, when a relative dies from cancer or if a friend dies in an accident, I'll make a stop sign so that my grief might disappear or float away with the bubbles.

Granted, children at the K-2 level are far from prepared to confront the stark realities associated with 9/11. But, it is up to the parents and guardians, within the confines of their homes, to address these issues. It is not up to the NEA, which seems to be living in a bubble of its own, to become judge, jury and mental health provider.

Perhaps most shocking and, to me, the most un-American is the NEA's lesson plan instruction that teachers should "discuss historical instances of American intolerance." The lesson continues to point to events like Pearl Harbor and the role of Arab-Americans during the Gulf War, asking teachers to prompt students to commiserate with the perpetrators instead of the victims. Sounds like Communism to me. Is anyone forgetting about the effect these events had on Americans or shall we continue to pursue the P.C. or politically correct angle of laying blame on ourselves instead of the real enemies? If I seem intolerant of those extremists who believe similarly to the individuals who rammed planes full of citizens into buildings, stabbed them, slashed their throats and ended their lives in the name of "Allah," then I'm proud to be intolerant.

Now that we have rightfully ripped into the NEA, let's turn to the textbook company, McDougal Littell, which has co-published, "The Challenge of Terrorism" with *USA Today*. Two of the chapters, which will infiltrate the minds of our older students, suggest more anti-American pro-terrorist rhetoric.

In "Why Do They Hate Us?" Fareed Zakaria tries to validate the idea that the U.S. has single-handedly made itself an enemy of the Muslim world, thereby excusing the events of 9/11. In "Who Is A Terrorist," an interview by Brian M. Jenkins, a guru on the topic of terrorism, the actions of terrorists are not considered "irrational." So, only sane people are mass murderers.

Folks, we are in dire danger of setting the minds of our youngsters on the path of approving terrorist activities and blaming ourselves for 9/11. If educators use these lesson plans, which come from an organization clearly recognized for its left-wing, politically correct, saccharine, unrealistic ideals, we will not only be doing our children and our country a disservice. And, that's as un-American as it gets. Perhaps, the NEA should spend more time constructing lesson plan instruction for math, science and English—subjects used in major state testing which have often proven that the majority of our nation's children have trouble multiplying without calculators or spelling without Spellcheck.

If you, like me, believe that these lesson plans are just a wee bit off kilter, please voice your opinion at sept11@nea.org.



POPCORN™ XXX: Doesn't Mark Spot for Entertainment

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 POPCORN

If you want to be today's action hero, you don't advertise it. Maybe you actually do believe in God, country, baseball and apple pie. But you wouldn't admit it. Not on a bet. After all, how cool would that be? Nah. You have to make like you don't care.

Take it from Vin Diesel in *XXX*, portraying rough-tough Xander Cage, a new secret agent for a new millennium.

What you're really into is cars, babes, extreme sports and partying. That, you don't mind bragging about. Even action heroes suffer the forces of peer pressure. However, if you happen to save the world on the way to proving how cool you are, well, that's OK, too. As long as it wasn't your primary goal and no one told you to do it. Because no one tells you what to do.

Like the young moviegoers who identify with you, you're still in your rebellious stage, playing around with your own combination of hedonism, narcissism and nihilism. And just so we know you mean business, you've gone skinhead and defaced your body with innumerable tattoos.

In short, you're doing everything you can to stave off buying that seven-room split with "such possibilities" and getting that Costco card. Who wants 12 pounds of mayonnaise anyway?

You're about more. Why, you're Vin Diesel, thumbing your nose at the entire world establishment, turning it inside out, and saving the day despite yourself, simply because you can. You're the accidental hero. Funny thing, though. If we didn't know better, we'd think you reminded us of another rebellious boy...only he stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni.

But what's that? You say you don't identify with the good guy, even if he is obliquely drawn? It's the villain that has always charged your battery?

Well, have no fear. Director Rob Cohen's over-the-top adventure yarn, written by Rich Wilkes, also supplies the script with the quintessential bad guy...Yorgi.

That's right...one name—Yorgi. Like Fabyan, or Madonna. He must be bad! Even Auric Goldfinger had two names. But then Yorgi, exacted by Marton Csokas, is entirely devoid of that famous scoundrel's class or character. At least Mr. Goldfinger cared about something...namely, gold. Yorgi, on the other hand, cares about nothing. Which actually makes him perfectly qualified to head *Anarchy 99*, a group of former Soviet soldiers dedicated to spreading world chaos.

Thanks to all those Russian scientists who were put out of work when the iron curtain came down, the Prague-based Yorgi and company have a weapon...and a really nasty one at that. So it's our dumbed-down secret agent versus their dumbed-down villain. Antithetical icons in a world that won't commit to anything. Will the globe get saved despite its ambivalent, common denominator self?

Diesel's reluctant hero, an extreme sports cult figure, internationally known thanks to the Internet, is the new generation's knight in shining armor. Figuratively speaking, of course. Thanks to designs by Sanja Milkovic Hays, who also wove the protagonist's duds in *The Fast and the Furious (2001)*, Diesel gets to make his semi-trendy, quasi-Village, partly biker fashion statement. In other words, those loose pants with lots of loops and a T-shirt.

Attired thusly in the film's opening scene, Xander Cage attempts the most spectacular feat involving a state senator's stolen red Corvette, a bridge, a parachute, and a river. The outlandish stunt winkingly reminds of the special effects-charged pranks common to most James Bond films. Part send-up of the genre, part homage, the outlandish overture is a mood-establishing tip-off of what is to follow.

In short, just as with 007, we are being advised not to take any of this very seriously. It's all FX-laden fantasy. And while his biceps might bespeak otherwise, it's doubtful Diesel did anything more strenuous than grimacing whilst filming said exploits.

Nevertheless, each action-packed stunt tries to outdo the last. And if there were an Academy Award given for most insanely conceived bit of derring-do, it'd be Xander Cage's snow board à la avalanche garnering the statuette next spring. But rest assured that this comic strip drama won't be earning any Oscars for acting. In fact, you deserve a prize if you can find a shred of characterization in all of *XXX*.

Nope. No solemn nods to Barrymore or Olivier here. The cartoon-like characters are merely labeled good or bad and tossed into the cinematic cauldron of violence, decadence and substance abuse. In addition to Diesel and Csokas as the good

and bad guy respectively, Asia Argento as Yelena, the love interest, is, well, gosh, her identity is just about the film's only twist.

Better not divulge who she really is. However, it can be related that Samuel L. Jackson is NSA Agent Gibbons, the veteran sleuth/spy talent scout who recruits Cage. The film's moral conscience (someone has to do it), he offers to erase Xander's potential jail time in return for the young man's secret agent stint. It's the old *Dirty Dozen (1967)* ploy. Cage begrudgingly agrees.

Gibbons then becomes the younger man's mentor. He's more like his guidance counselor. Remember, Xander has an aversion to doing anything that might be construed as a good deed.

Hence Jackson's devoted civil servant must set up little carrot and stick situations. And he also has to apply reverse psychology ("Don't you dare infiltrate *Anarchy 99* and find out what they're up to") as well as make each death-defying mission seem like a game.

The bottom line is Xander Cage is willing to save the world from annihilation, but only if it's fun. Applying the same criteria to movie selection, everyone but adolescents would have to wonder why, why would someone want to see *XXX*?

XXX, rated PG-13, is a Columbia Pictures release directed by Rob Cohen and stars Vin Diesel, Asia Argento and Marton Csokas. Running time: 124 minutes.



ACADIAN MELODIES...The Union County Freeholder Board's final concert in the Summer Arts Festival series of free outdoor concerts at Echo Lake Park will include the French-Canadian folk group, Barachois, on Wednesday, August 28, at 7:30 p.m.

French-Canadian Folk Group Will Present Free Concert at Echo Lake

WESTFIELD — The final performance in the Summer Arts Festival series of free outdoor concerts at Echo Lake Park will feature the singing and dancing of the French-Canadian folk group, Barachois, on Wednesday, August 28, at 7:30 p.m.

Pronounced "bara-shwa," the quartet includes Albert Arsenault, Hélène Bergeron, Louise Arsenault and Chuck Arsenault.

"Barachois will dazzle the audience with incredibly fast dancing, fiddling and steady rhythm so familiar in Acadian music," stated Union County Freeholder Deborah Scanlon, Liaison to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. "They are celebrated from coast to coast and throughout the world for their originality, musicality and their stand-up comedy."

Prior to their concert at Echo Lake Park, Barachois was featured this summer at Irish festivals in Milwaukee and Cleveland. After their Union County appearance, the band will appear at folk music festivals in Newport and Boston, before returning to Canada.

Since their formation on Prince Edward Island eight years ago, Barachois has also headlined shows throughout Europe and at Lincoln Center in New York City.



By Marylou Morano

Garden State Picks Cream Of Crop in Children's Books

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Children looking for interesting summer reading can turn to books awarded the 2002 Garden State Children's Book Awards, presented this spring at the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) Conference in Somerset.

Established in 1977 in order to give recognition to books for early and middle grade readers, literary nominees are chosen by a committee of the NJLA Children's Services Section.

One of the criteria used for award selection is popularity with readers. A three-year lapse in time from the original publication date is allowed in order to determine popularity.

Easy readers were represented by both book and series. Cynthia Rylant's "Henry and Mudge and the Snowman Plan," a Simon and Schuster Book for Young Readers, won for Early Reader Series. It is the 19th book in the Henry and Mudge Series.

The Easy to Read Book Winner is "One Saturday Afternoon" by Barbara Baker. This Dutton Easy Reader is an animated true-to-life story of a typical family with several youngsters of differing ages. It is a wonderful sequel to Baker's "One Saturday Morning," published in 1994.

Ask a mid-grade student what comes to mind when you mention the word "underpants" and the answer is sure to be "Captain Underpants." NJLA's award for Younger Fiction goes to "Captain Underpants and the Attack of the Talking Toilets," written and illustrated

by Dav Pilkey. Toted as "another epic novel" this Scholastica release continues the saga of George Beard and Harold Hutchins and their magical powers to turn their principal, Mr. Krupp, into Captain Underpants.

The Award for Younger Nonfiction was given to "Behold...the Dragons!" written and illustrated by Gail Gibbons. Well researched and full of facts, this book has everything you could ever want to know about dragons. — their origins, mythology and why they continue to be a source of fascination for us today.

Additional awards in the category of Fiction: Grades 6 to 8 was presented to "Skellig," written by British Author, David Almond and published by Delacourt Press. "Skellig" is a multi-level novel that is a blend of suspense and fantasy. The book is also a Michael Printz Award winner for excellence in Young Adult Fiction.

The award for Fiction Grades 9 to 12 went to "Speak" by Laurie Halse Anderson. Previously reviewed in this Book Nook column, "Speak" tells the story of a teenage girl's muteness after she experiences date rape.

"Spiders in the Hairdo: Modern Urban Legends" by Bill Mooney and David Holt received NJLA's award for Nonfiction: Grades 6 to 12.

A New Picture Book

Get the wee ones back in the September swing with "Morning Song" written by Mary McKenna Siddals and published by Henry Holt (2001). This little tyke starts his day by saying good morning to everything he sees. The words are simple, yet delightful and the illustrations blend well with the text. It's a good "get back into the swing of school" book.

Dames at Sea

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silly? Of course. Is it corny? You bet. Are there references to people and places that anyone under 35 might not know? Sure. But there's such fun in this show, the audience buys into every minute of it.

At the end of Act I it looks like their show will fold, literally, because the bulldozer sent by the WPA is knocking down the back wall of the theater. Mona plans to have Dick's work be the replacement for opening night, staging it on board their ship.

When Cocuzza sings, "sweep your glooms away with a song," that's what happens to the audience because of her Carol Burnett-like pizzazz.

The show within a show develops after intermission with the cleverly designed set by Jeremy Doucette that has revolved to reveal a two-tiered deck complete with working port-holes and movable metal stairways. Making the best use of the ingenious set, actors use the sidepieces, also two-tiered, to great effect. The look is reminiscent of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* with characters running in and out and up and down.

One very notable song from the second act, "The Beguine" proves loads of fun with tango, slapstick, movement and visual interplay. And then how else could the show end except happily with all three couples wearing wedding attire?

The mark of the theater professional is the mark of the triple threat: singer, dancer, and actor. That is what their director/teacher Meryl demands, and that is just what this group of rising stars delivers.

Reiko Hasegawa

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logical to containing basic and surface meanings — Hasegawa managed to freeze the emotion in the eyes of the posers.

"It (photography) can act as a ticket to another place, an escape from the everyday," said Hasegawa, who is schooled in 35 mm, Hasselblad, Mamiya, 4x5 large format Toyo View, strobes and lighting.

The landscape and exotic culture of India would be Hasegawa's great escape, for the photographer said she would find herself entranced by the fact that there would always be "something different, something new to learn from."

Ideally, however, Hasegawa would like to base herself in London, where she might travel in different directions to seize in her lens the most glorious angles of foreign lands.

Until that day, her freelance work has led her to taking promotional shots of a woman's clothing line, which she is cataloging for her website. Hasegawa has also been snapping headshots for special clients. A good start to a career that is sure to flourish to worlds beyond Fanwood.

TIME SHARE - Atlantic Palace
on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, N.J.

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