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DONALD MCLEAN'S

ENTERTAINMENT

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FILM: ARABIAN NIGHTS

ARABIAN NIGHTS, now playing at the Lumiere Theatre, is the final film of director/writer Pier Paolo Pasolini's "trilogy of life," following "Canterbury Tales" and "The Decameron." It is definitely a fairy tale . . . in more ways than one.

Rated X, though not hardcore at all, it would be interesting to time the 130 minute movie to see how long is the longest stretch of film without showing male genitalia; my guess would be about ten minutes at most. Acres of naked male flesh, dozens of Italian penises, usually pubescent teenagers, and if all those attractive boys these peni are attached to cannot act, who really cares?! Pasolini was brutally murdered two years ago in a gay scandal and his films reveal his never-ending reverence of youthful male flesh. And unfortunately, like so many gay directors, his women are also built like young boys, small-breasted, slim-hipped and virtually sexless.

If you are still reading and haven't hailed the nearest cab to the Lumiere, I feel duty-bound to report that even with Dante Ferretti's often magnificent sets and Danilo Donati's authentic Babylonian robes, Pasolini's vision of "1000 and One Nights" is sluggish, choppy filmmaking. The film moves steadily at a snail's pace, with no highs or lows, just monotonous story-telling. There is never any tension, any physical action (beyond languid embraces and endless people running toward, away from, or just in circles through various towns and countryside) or any true sense of adventure. We are never caught up IN the film, we just watch it meander casually by. There is no such thing as a real performance, just closeups of faces registering murky looks that are supposed to convey whatever emotion Pasolini wanted at the moment. Basically, he relies upon "smile" and "serious" to relate all; only Pasolini regular Ninetto Davoli goes beyond those two . . . he adds "crying" to score the acting coup of the film.

The film has several stories, starting with the longest and dullest between young master Nuredin and his slave-girl Zumurrud, who get separated by thieves, she becoming King of the City by living in drag while Nuredin combs the country looking for her. Far more interesting are the two tales of two holy men who relate how they happened upon this life after misguided youths. And there is the story of Aziz (Davoli), who fell in love with a mysterious woman on the eve of his wedding and who ultimately paid the price when the woman castrated him.

The movie is never as exotic or "fairytalish" as the title would lead you to desire, but made in 1974, it is certainly Pasolini's most romantic, least violent and most visually stunning achievement.

It depends upon how you feel about Pasolini; personally, I feel he was a director who had nothing to say but said it endlessly . . . and with great panache.

-DMc