

The movies

'Max Dugan' breezy comedy from Neil Simon

"Max Dugan Returns," starring Marsha Mason, Jason Robards, Donald Sutherland and Matthew Broderick; written by Neil Simon; directed by Herbert Ross. A 20th Century-Fox release, rated PG. ★★½.

By DAVID BARON

In two of his recent outings, "Only When I Laugh" and "Chapter Two," playwright-screenwriter Neil Simon seemed to be attempting to expand his range somewhat, choosing relatively "serious" subjects like alcoholism or the loss of a spouse and treating them with what one could only presume was his idea of weightiness.

The results, in my view, were not notably successful (Simon appeared content to leave us, in "Laugh," with the peculiar notion that nocturnal boozing binges are OK as long as one can still get up in time for lunch the next day at Tavern on the Green). And so, perhaps understandably, he has reverted in his latest picture, "Max Dugan Returns" (now at area theaters), to what he has always done best: straight comedy.

The result? A light — indeed, so ferociously light it seems whipped — and breezy comic confection in which the most pressing problem on anyone's horizon is supporting a family on a teacher's pay. Clearly, Simon isn't going for any big messages this time around, and he's pretty much content to let his predictable but still markedly serviceable sense of humor earn him a steady stream of small but honest laughs.

MARSHA MASON, Simon's once-but-not-necessarily-future wife and leading lady, plays Nora, a young woman who's not quite making ends meet trying to keep herself and teenage son Michael (Matthew Broderick) afloat. Abandoned by her ex-con father (Jason Robards) 28 years before, Nora is understandably startled — and, initially, angry — when the old geezer suddenly reappears, announcing he's got only six months to live and is determined to spend them making his daughter and grandson happy.

Max, it develops, has just left Las Vegas carrying \$687,000 in cold — but still very hot — cash... and the next thing Nora and Mike know, he begins making like Santa Claus in springtime: a Mercedes for the little lady, who's just had her car stolen; batting lessons for the kid from Chicago White Sox coach Charley Lau; and much, much more....

Nora, who's tried to raise Michael with a healthy respect for the law, is at a loss for what to do — as, later on, is her boyfriend (Donald Sutherland), a policeman who puts duty before romance. In the end, though, it all comes out — as you'd expect — just fine, with Nora learning that just about everyone (herself included) has a touch of larceny in him.



Marsha Mason, Jason Robards: All pleasant fluff in 'Max Dugan Returns'

IT GOES WITHOUT saying — "Max" being an example of Simon at his most familiarly conventional — that, as directed by Herbert Ross (doing his fifth Simon screenplay), the picture is structured around a network of plot contrivances of truly monumental transparency. Sutherland, looking slightly bewildered by the material, gives a rather goofy performance as the cop, and Mason — who does know how to handle Simon's stuff, as by now she certainly ought to — is competent if not exactly a breath of fresh air as Nora. Still, it would be difficult to argue that "Max" isn't an audience-pleaser, and if nothing else it performs a valuable public service by providing the estimable Robards with one of his most delectably eccentric comic roles since "A Thousand Clowns." For that alone, one can be grateful.

"Max Dugan Returns" has been rated PG for its mildly salty language.

'Tough Enough' out for the count as 'Rocky' ripoff

"Tough Enough," starring Dennis Quaid, Stan Shaw, Carlene Watkins, Pam Grier and Warren Oates; written by John Leone; directed by Richard O. Fleischer. A 20th Century-Fox release, rated PG. ★½.

By DAVID BARON

"Tough Enough" (now at area theaters) certainly isn't the first of the "Rocky" ripoffs, and it's safe to say that it won't be the last, either. In all likelihood, however, it will go down as one of the most brazen... and probably one of the worst.

Dennis Quaid, whom you may fondly remember from "Breaking Away," plays the lead role here, and he is the only redeeming feature of the flick. (There is a boxer by the

name of Battling Gay Bob, "representing the hairdressers of San Francisco," but I don't suppose he counts.)

Our hero, Art Long (Quaid), is an aspiring country-western singer who decides — much to the chagrin of his dutiful wife (Carlene Watkins) — to box his way to a recording contract. His unlikely route to stardom is called Tough Man, a series of amateur sparring competitions run by a slick promoter named Neese (the late Warren Oates, in his final film role); after he wins some preliminary bouts in his hometown of Fort Worth, Art takes on a soul-mate/trainer named P.T. Coolidge (Stan Shaw), and together with their spouses the two men head for the championships in Detroit.

What follows should be utterly predictable to anyone even remotely acquainted with the basic "Rocky" scenario, but events unfold here with

a truly shameless fealty to the Sylvester Stallone originals. There's even a scene in which Art does a carbon-copy re-enactment of Rocky Balboa's big moment at the top of the steps of the Philadelphia Museum... except that he's in Motown instead.

"TOUGH ENOUGH" also follows the now-familiar ploy of having the white hero go picturesquely jogging with his black trainer/buddy. Presumably this sells extra tickets in inner-city movie houses, but Shaw's character is not nearly as well developed as that of Carl Weathers in the recent "Rocky III," and the character of Shaw's girlfriend (Pam Grier) is not developed at all.

Quaid has a pleasant enough singing voice — which is fortunate, since he gets to perform three songs in the picture — but his character, though affable, is hardly the stuff of either taut drama or action comedy. Watkins, meanwhile, is stuck playing a cliché as his wife.

The real heart of the problem with "Tough Enough," however, is to be found in John Leone's daffy, chock-full-of-miracles script. In the climactic bout, for instance, Art is getting the living daylight knocked out of him when he suddenly begins to hear a song in his head. (That's right — a song!) Is it a 1984 Grammy winner, country division? His ticket to stardom? We never find out, but it must be a humdinger because our hero suddenly turns into Muhammad Ali-times-five... and, well, you can probably guess the rest.

Oh, well: A formula is a formula is a formula. I suppose, and director Richard O. Fleischer ("Fantastic Voyage," "The Boston Strangler") was obviously not about to argue with success. Too bad he didn't, though; he might at least have made a film that was bad in its own way, rather than somebody else's.

"Tough Enough" has been rated PG for its occasional bloodletting, but the violence here is relatively sanitized, as these things go.



Dennis Quaid: No knockout in ripoff 'Tough Enough'

Bay St. Louis hotel abandoned, for sale again

By ANDREA KINGSMILL

I recently visited Bay St. Louis and noticed the hotel that sits just across the bay. I was told the hotel was built before the highways and bridges were built. The hotel reportedly went broke after the highways were completed. I also heard a religious group purchased the hotel. Who owns the building now? Do you know if the present owners have intentions of renovating the building? It seems like a crime to let a building that size go to waste. Any information you can supply on the building's history and current status would be appreciated. — R.W.

The abandoned resort hotel on the north shore of Bay St. Louis has long been a source of fascination for me. I'm glad for the opportunity to research its history.

The somber, deteriorated building facing the bay is what's left of the once elegant and lively Pine Hills resort hotel, which opened its grand doors to hotel guests on Dec. 20, 1926.

The history of the site dates back to the time when it was first described by one of Iberville's lieutenants, the Comte de Lisle, who explored Bay St. Louis in August 1700 — shortly after Iberville established the first French settlement on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

De Lisle described the area in his diary, saying that drinking water casks from his ship were filled at a spring on the site. The site was also said to be a camping ground for Choctaw Indians.

William Alexander Whitfield built the Shelly Plantation on the site in 1845. It was transformed into a nursery about the turn of the century.

In 1925, a group of New Orleans businessmen purchased a portion of the plantation and converted it into an 18-hole golf course and clubhouse. Soon after, their plans for Pine Hills hotel became a reality.

It cost \$1,350,000 to construct the six-story luxury resort hotel and \$200,000 to furnish it — in style.

The investment seemed worth it. The rich upperclass from New Orleans and surrounding areas made the hotel their home away from home. But the enterprise flopped just three years later.

Construction of U.S. 90 in 1928 and the stock market crash a year later were blamed for the demise of the hotel. U.S. 90 was supposed to skirt the bay but instead was routed by bridge across the bay 9 miles south of the hotel, making the hotel virtually inaccessible.

Even if guests wanted to get to the hotel they couldn't because the "crash" rendered most of them penniless.

The hotel was vacant until 1953. Its only guests had been Army troops who stayed for six months in 1942.

The property was purchased in 1953 by the Oblate Fathers and renovated into an Oblate major seminary. The Oblate Fathers stayed 15 years and



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then moved the seminary to St. Louis, where it could be located near college facilities.

The seminary went up for sale. The asking price was \$657,000.

Again the building sat, until January 1981 when a group of 20 investors purchased the property with the intention of cleaning it up and either selling or converting the hotel into a condominium/townhouse complex, whichever opportunity presented itself first.

Harry Geller of Geller Investment Inc. of Gulfport, president of the partnership that purchased the property, said all plans for development were scrapped six months ago.

"Money was tight, and we just couldn't build," said Geller. "The property is still for sale. The original plans to convert the 180-room hotel structure into 70 or so condominiums fell through."

Geller said the asking price for the property, surrounded by 83 acres of land, is \$1.6 million. Naturally he hopes to sell it before the year ends. "We've had offers but it's still up for grabs."

Geller said the building is structurally sound but has fallen into disrepair and was badly vandalized.

The property will be kept under close guard until it is sold, said Geller. Abandoned, once again.

I mailed a check in the amount of \$30.16 to the Old Village Shop to cover the cost of two items I ordered. I received only part of my order and contacted the company inquiring as to what happened with the other order. The shoes I ordered finally arrived but were the wrong size. I returned them within the required 14 days so that I could get a refund. I never received a refund and am wondering if I ever will. Can you help? — F.A.P.

Old Village Shop, a division of Hanover House Industries in Hanover, Pa., said a refund in the amount of \$14.88 was issued to you. Their records indicate that the check was cashed on March 3. So, I am assuming that you have already received your refund for the shoes and are satisfied with the outcome.

You may call 821-1727 or write The People Helper at The Times-Picayune/The States-Item, 3800 Howard Ave., New Orleans, 70140. The People Helper will consider every question received. Only the most interesting and helpful questions are published. Requests not answered in the column cannot be answered or acknowledged otherwise.

The calendar

Compiled by Alonzo J. Riley

For Monday, March 28

Louisiana Nature Center, 11000 Lake Forest Blvd., begins a course in "Forests and Wildflowers," consisting of three class sessions and two field trips. 7. By fee. For information call 241-9606.

McDonough 15 School, 721 St. Philip St., presents an art show featuring works by students, parents and friends, 7 to 9 today (with music by Walter Payton and His New Orleans Jazz Trio) and 9 a.m. to 4 Tues. For information call 895-8144.

Citizens for Safe Energy holds a benefit party marking the fourth anniversary of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident, at 43 Fontainebleau Drive. 7 to 10. By donation.

Xavier University presents a panel discussion on "The Impact of Supreme Court Decisions on Black History," featuring Judges Joan Armstrong, Revius Ortique, Israel Augustine, Robert Collins and Lionel Collins, in the Pharmacy Auditorium, 7. Free.

Peace and Justice Campaign of Latin America presents talks by the Rev. Eugenio, a Baptist minister from Nicaragua, and Nancy Donovan, a Maryknoll nun, on "The Churches in Nicaragua," at the St. Joseph Provincial House, 1200 Mirabeau Ave., 7.

Film Buffs Institute of Loyola University, 865-3196, screens "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" (starring Tom Courtenay and Michael Redgrave; directed by Tony Richardson, England, 1962), in Room 332 of Bobet Hall, 7 and 9; and two documentaries "Glass" (directed by Bert Haanstra, the Netherlands, 1958) and "High School" (Frederick Wiseman, 1969), in Room 214 of Bobet Hall, 7 and 9. All by admission.

Tulane University Center for Archaeology sponsors two slide-lectures by Javier Gonzalez-Chamorro, on

"The Chalcolithic Age in the Iberian Peninsula," in the Presidents Rooms of the Tulane University Center, 7:30 today, and "The Bronze Age in Southern Spain and Portugal," at the Middle American Research Institute in Dinwiddie Hall, 3:30 Tues. Free. For information call 865-5336.

St. Charles Parish Planetarium, St. Charles Parish West Branch Library, Highway 90 at Lakewood Drive, Luling, presents a show on X-ray astronomy titled "Visions of Einstein," 7:30. Free.

Mid-South Sports presents "Championship Wrestling" at the St. Bernard Civic Auditorium, 8245 W. Judge Perez Drive, Chalmette, 7:30. By admission.

Concerts

Xavier University presents a piano recital by William Dugan of works by Haydn, Paderewski, Liszt, Gershwin and Chopin, in the University Auditorium, 8. Free.

Nightclubs

Blue Room, Fairmont Hotel, 529-4744. The Platters, 9 and 11.

Maple Leaf Bar, 8316 Oak St., 866-9359. James Booker, 10.

Penny Post Coffee House, 5110 Danneel St. Mousie Clark, 8. Tom Rice, 9. Pat Flory, 10. Carlos Barrientes, 11.

Tipitina's, 501 Napoleon Ave., 899-9114. The Jive, 10:30.

Tyler's Beer Garden, 5234 Magazine St., 891-4989. Ellis Marsalis and Steve Masakowski, 10.

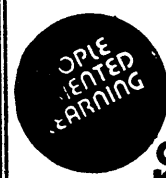
For Tuesday, March 29

Showbiz Pizza Place, 3791 Gen. DeGaulle Drive, Algiers, presents a traveling "Petting Zoo" featuring a zebra, monkey, Welsh pony, ostrich, etc., 11 a.m. to 11. By admission.

Louisiana World Exposition and the International Trade Mart sponsor a briefing on "The 1984 World's Fair: Latest Developments," at the Plimsoll Club in the Trade Mart (30th floor), noon. By admission. For information call 529-1601.

Jackson Square Concerts series, sponsored by NORD, presents the Carroll College Jazz Band from Wisconsin, in Jackson Square, noon. Free.

Please send information on events open to the public to: Alonzo J. Riley, Calendar of Events, The Times-Picayune/The States-Item, 3800 Howard Ave., New Orleans 70140. Information must be received one week prior to event. Nightclubs that change their acts regularly are listed each day, others only in the Lagniappe calendar on Friday. Evening events are listed in the paper on the day they occur, daytime events on the previous day.



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REDUCING ABSENTEEISM — A half-day seminar by Dr. Ronald Millman on the causes of absenteeism and tardiness and corrective approaches. 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., March 30th, on the Loyola Campus. \$40.

METHODS FOR EFFECTIVE REASONING — A half-day program by Dr. Anthony Waters, Associate Prof. of Logic, on methods for distinguishing effective and sound reasoning approaches from deceptive ones. 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., April 7th, at The Statesman's Club, W. Robert E. Lee Blvd. \$30.

PRINCIPLES OF SUPERVISION — A short course by Dr. John Cave, Associate Prof. of Management, on practical aspects of the first-level supervisory process. This course may be applied toward a Supervisory Certificate. 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on five Thursdays starting April 7th at The Statesman's Club, W. Robert E. Lee Blvd. \$90.

Telephone 885-3530 for registration information.

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