

NEW FILMS

Winter Movie Round-Up

Here's a quick round-up of some of the movies that opened locally over the holidays.

Dances With Wolves is a gem that deserves its hype as a hot Oscar prospect. This western is long, liberal and daring in an old-fashioned, Hollywood sort of way.

It tells the story of John Dunbar (Kevin Costner), a Civil War veteran who asks to be posted on the frontier. He wants to see it before it's gone, the soldier explains. Isolated and alone, Dunbar finds himself befriended by the Sioux Indians who live nearby. He soon begins adopting the ways and customs of the Sioux — Dunbar has more in common with them than the distant military command he presumably represents.

The story is a simple one, but it succeeds for two reasons. First, as star and director, Costner's desire to follow a strong, clear storyline gets the better of his sentiments. Like John Ford, he generally sticks to his narrative guns. Except for some unnecessary voice-overs from Dunbar that state the obvious — the Sioux behave decently and fairly; most white men they come in contact with are wasteful and bad — Costner avoids preaching.

Secondly, the Sioux are not presented as victims. Here they are seen as *heroes*, people that value family and honor and actively defend them. That point-of-view is much more dramatically compelling. And it allows this ironic, unsentimental movie to become one of the best of the year. ★ ★ ★ 1/2.

Mermaids certainly isn't, but it's a well-acted, amusing

cessful (Cher makes a play for Ryder's beau) and some not (the film comes to a screeching halt to mourn the assassination of Kennedy). But it's ably done and rarely boring. ★ ★ 1/2.

Neither is *The Russia House*, a convoluted John Le Carre thriller about a literary agent (Sean Connery) corralled into derring-do for the C.I.A. Everything here is competent and Connery is always engaging. But once you've seen this cold, rather bloodless tale, you never need to see — or even think of it — again. ★ ★.

Edward Scissorhands is a fable about a young man built by an inventor who dies and leaves Edward with scissors instead of hands.

Edward is a truly beguiling figure and Johnny Depp gives a great performance in an almost wordless role. Watching this creature knit his brow in concentration when trimming hedges or cutting hair is a priceless experience.

But director Tim Burton has surrounded this wonderful act of imagination with a tired story. He offers flat satire of a '50s suburb where the men mechanically leave for work and the homes are cookie-cutter identical.

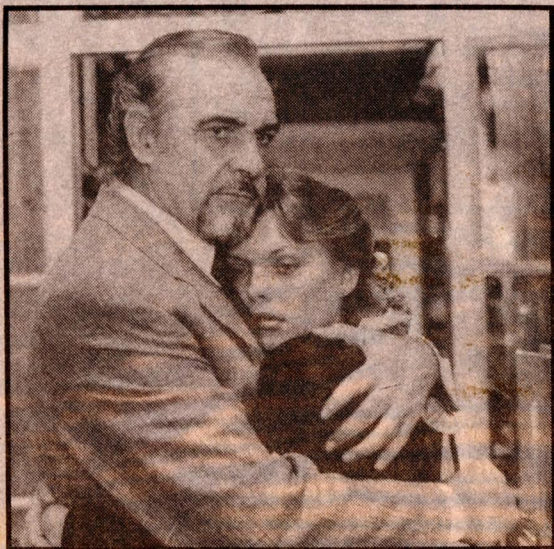
There's also a stereotypical religious fanatic who pops up every so often but doesn't advance the plot one whit. She's so uninteresting that she seems to have sprung from a different

mind. Edward deserved much better, but he's such a delightful conceit that the movie is still worthwhile. ★ ★ 1/2.

And if you really want to know about *Look Who's Talking Too*, *Three Men and A Little Lady*,

Havana or *The Rookie*, then you should be forced to sit through every *Police Academy* film and learn to avoid movies you knew were going to be bad in the first place.

By Michael Giltz



Michelle Pfeiffer clings like Saran Wrap in the *Russia House*.

drama nonetheless. It takes place in the '60s when a young girl (Winona Ryder) is filled with desires, both carnal and spiritual, and filled with embarrassment over her unconventional mother (Cher). Ryder has teen angst down pat and Cher plays herself with convincing humor.

The screenplay takes a few unexpected turns, some suc-



Cher and her happy family from *Mermaids*.