

'Rabbit Test': Pregnant pause

By Janet Maslin
N.Y. Times News Service

NEW YORK — As Woody Allen's career demonstrates, there's no good reason why a stand-up comic with a nervous, staccato delivery can't adapt to that style to fit the demands of a feature-length film, provided that the comedy stems from a consistent, genuinely funny point of view.

Joan Rivers's nightclub routines abound with the same kind of self-deprecation and misanthropy in which Allen used to specialize, and her promise for "Rabbit Test" — what would happen if a man became pregnant? — sounds like it might be good for an hour-and-a-half's worth of bunny fluff. (It opened this weekend at West Towne Cinema and Stage Door Theater.)

Review

But like entirely too many comics before her, Miss Rivers has turned to directing without paying much heed to whether a whole movie constructed from one-liners is worth even the sum of its parts. In her case, it's not — and the one-liners weren't all that sparkling to begin with.

When it winds up on television, which is where a movie this visually crude belonged in the first place, "Rabbit Test" may improve slightly: Constant commercial interruptions may help distract attention from the movie's continuity problems, which are severe. And the coarseness of its

comedy may not seem so insufferable to an audience willing to sit still for "Laverne and Shirley."

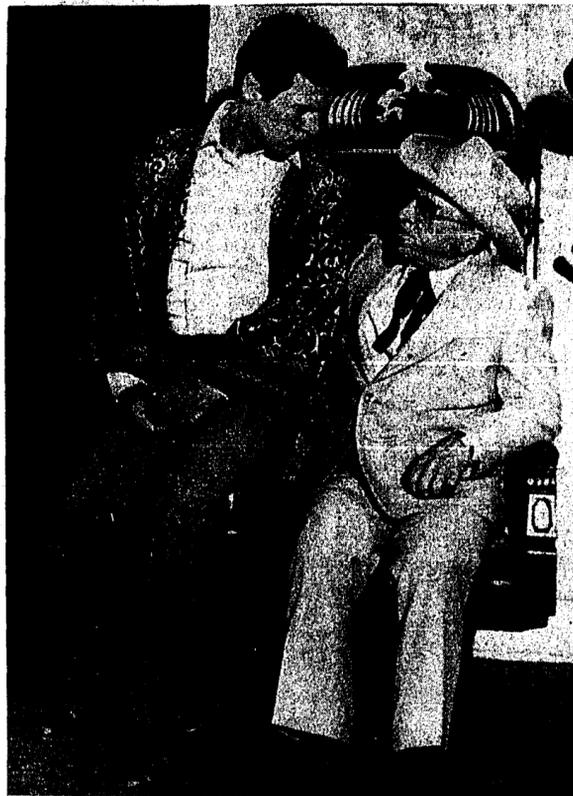
Miss Rivers's jokes mostly have to do with racial stereotypes and the essential revoltingness of pregnancy, but a few of them are funny just the same. However, as a director, Miss Rivers is forever sandbagging her own scenes, throwing away a good chuckle in a sequence that desperately needs a punch line, or wasting something fairly subtle right after a broad, dopey joke about a urine sample. Whenever one does laugh, it's in spite of the movie, rather because of it.

At mechanically regular intervals, a variety of veteran performers wander by for wasted cameos — the cast includes George Gobel, Imogene Coca, Richard Deacon, Paul Lynde, Sheree North, Tom Poston and a lot of

other players who are almost always funnier than they are here. Too many of them mimic Miss Rivers's breathless delivery, and in some cases — like Alex Rocco's — the dialogue is so speedy it becomes almost inaudible. As for the world's first pregnant man, played by Billy Crystal, his predicament turns out to be a lot less curious than it sounds.

Miss Rivers makes almost nothing of the role-reversal possibilities her premise suggests, and Crystal manages to convey neither astonishment nor acceptance of the impossible. He just becomes pregnant and has a baby, and that's the end of that.

"Rabbit Test," which has been rated PG ("Parental Guidance Suggested"), contains a number of bathroom jokes, mostly of an infantile nature.



Billy Crystal and George Goebel in 'Rabbit Test.'

Guide to movies in Madison area

This guide is a service to help readers decide for themselves what movies they might like to see. Capsule summaries of films currently playing in Madison are compiled from information appearing in the Independent Film Journal and Christian Science Monitor. Film ratings are included at the conclusion of each summary. Further critical evaluation is supplied in full-length film reviews appearing in the State Journal.

Crossed Swords — The latest movie version of Mark Twain's parable on egalitarianism, offers a nicely credible Oliver Reed as the wronged nobleman Miles Hendon who squires the future King Edward VI back to London just in time to prevent a look-alike ragamuffin from being crowned in his place.

Producer Alexander Salkind apparently had nothing more in mind than the further amortization of period costumes and sets left over from his "Three (and Four) Musketeers." "Crossed Swords" just creeps along, ignoring a generation whose perception of British history has been permanently transmogrified by Monty Python's Flying Circus. (PG)

Straight Time — A quartet of astonishing performances dominates this grim tale of a parolee's failure to adjust his life according to society's terms. Directed by Ulu Grosbard with an unerring sense of place and gesture: only a weak feable lead, a wide bore in the plot and an inconclusive ending make the alarming drama fall short of classic status. Dustin Hoffman Stars. (R)

Annie Hall — Woody Allen's Academy Award-winning film is a serious

comedy which is uproarious most of the way. Allen plays a successful comedian named Alvy Singer who battles over people's pretensions and his own insecurities (including sexual ones) while falling in and out of love with the title character played by Diane Keaton. She also won an Academy Award for best actress for her part in the film. (PG)

The Boys in Company C — One of a dozen or so films based on the Vietnam War expected to hit the screen this year follows five young Marines and several of their officers from boot camp to combat zone. Overlong and not as sharp a blend of comedy and drama as one would hope for, the film is an affecting rites-of-passage tale and scores as a touching portrait of five boys who are shaped into men and the short-lived manhood which several of them experience. Standout performances by Andrew Stevens, Scott Hylands and James Whitmore Jr. merit special mention. (R)

Blue Collar — The scene is a Detroit automobile factory, and the subject is the way three of the assembly

line workers deal with their rage, frustration and sense of helplessness. Fine performances by Richard Pryor, Harvey Keitel and Yaphet Kotto and vivid dialogue, but the overall impact is not overwhelming. Its subject and the reputation of its director, Paul Schrader, who wrote "Taxi Driver," might enable it to unite the action market with the art house crowd. (R)

The Fury — Shot on location in Chicago, "The Fury" is about a man (Kirk Douglas) who had worked for a secret government agency and is trying now to rescue his son, possessed of psychic powers, from the agency, which intends to use him for their own devious needs. (R)

House Calls — Combines laughs in two unlikely topics: the sex revolution and today's medicine. Walter Matthau is a divorced doctor enjoying an abundance of available women. He meets his match in Glenda Jackson, a divorcee with a mind of her own. Matthau's mugging and Jackson's brittle wit combine magnificently. The rating is PG, but the sex quotient may alarm some parents.

Coma — When patients who check into a Boston hospital for routine surgery inexplicably lapse into irreversible comas, surgeon Genevieve Bujold suspects foul play and snoops around. Then the terror begins. Good story with enough chilling suspense to smooth the lumpy plotting and drama. (PG)

The Turning Point — A joyful celebration of dance as well as an insightful study of relationships between women. On both levels the film succeeds magnificently. Dancer Shirley MacLaine chose a family, Anne Bancroft remained a ballerina. They meet 20 years later and old loves and antagonisms return. (PG)

"Saturday Night Fever" — TV's John Travolta, a disco king courting his queen (Karen Lynn Gorney) on and off the dance floor, finds he still has some maturing to do. The plot is extremely weak but Travolta shines as brightly as the film's disco scenes. Slick but entertaining with music by the Bee Gees. (R)

Motion Picture Association of America rating definitions:

G — General audiences. Film contains no material most parents are likely to consider objectionable even for younger children.

PG — Parental guidance suggested. Some material might be unsuitable for children. Inquire about the film before deciding upon attendance.

R — Restricted. Film contains adult type material. Persons under 17 require accompanying parent or adult guardian.

X — This is patently an adult-type film. No one under 18 admitted.

Films

Wisconsin State Journal

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Campus cinema

Showtimes for the weekly listing of films being shown on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus are not included because they frequently change. To confirm room numbers and times, contact the Campus Assistance Center, 263-2400; or on the day of the event, the Audio Dateline: 263-4010. Films are scheduled for students, faculty and members of the University staff.

Today

The Women — 19 Commerce
Bananas — B-10 Commerce
Magical Mystery Tour — 5208 Social Science
A Comedy of Terrors — 5206 Social Science
Harold and Maude — B-102 Van Vleck
Cabaret — B-130 Van Vleck

Tuesday

The Road to Glory — B-10 Commerce

Wednesday

The Road to Glory — B-10 Commerce

Thursday

The Enforcer — B-10 Commerce

Carnal Knowledge — B-102 Van Vleck
Summer of '42 — 105 Psychology

Friday

The Enforcer — B-10 Commerce
Spellbound — 19 Commerce
Joe — 6210 Social Science
Carnal Knowledge — B-130 Van Vleck
Summer of '42 — 105 Psychology

Saturday

The Creature from the Black Lagoon — B-10 Commerce
A Thousand Clowns — 6210 Social Science
Sabrina — B-102 Van Vleck
Maltese Falcon — 19 Commerce
Bye Bye Birdie — 5208 Social Science

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