

— Movie Review —



**DON PEDRO CRUZ
AT THE MOVIES**

Ever since the surprise endings of “The Sixth Sense” and “Memento,” I always go into any scary mystery movie looking for the twist. Martin Scorsese’s “Shutter Island” is clearly going for the “gotcha!” moment from early on – with haunting flashbacks and dream sequences that slowly form the puzzle pieces of this mystery-thriller.

All the elements are there for a good scare: a wild storm, the old buildings of a 1950s mental hospital with creepy patients and creepier doctors, a forgotten cemetery and dangerous, windswept cliffs. Into this setting, two U.S. marshals become embroiled in the search for a murderous psycho mom who vanished from her room at the hospital for the criminally insane.

Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) walks the line between macho, unshakable ex-soldier and vulnerable widower battling his personal demons. Throughout the movie, Teddy wants only to be the hero and solve the mystery, unsure of

‘Island’ a thrilling mystery that fails to rise to greatness



Paramount Pictures

U.S. MARSHALS CHUCK AULE (Mark Ruffalo) and Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) take refuge in an old mausoleum. One of many spooky locations they investigate on “Shutter Island.”

whom to trust. Unfortunately, he quickly finds his own grip on sanity unraveling with each bit of truth he reveals.

The film does a good job of keeping up the suspense while moving the narrative forward. But I could have done with less of the bizarre dream sequences and more hard-boiled detective work to get to the end. There were enough dark corridors and deranged characters to keep

things sufficiently spooky without the ghostly special effects that fill Teddy’s nightmares constantly interrupting.

Although there are some bloody scenes, “Shutter Island” keeps to more psychological scariness than the in-your-face gore and guts of less intelligent scare films.

I can’t say I was completely surprised by the outcome, but “Shutter Island” does take a

step beyond the final revelation and briefly explores the bigger impact for Teddy. The point of the movie is not the mystery itself, but what it comes to mean for Teddy after that point, and I found that more satisfying.

The last time that Scorsese and DiCaprio teamed up, they scored four Oscar wins – including Best Director and Best Picture – for “The Departed” in 2006. Although this film is well-crafted and includes a great supporting cast, I don’t see it rising to that level.

Mark Ruffalo as Teddy’s partner Chuck and Max Von Sydow and Ben Kingsley as two of the doctors at the hospital have some great moments keeping you guessing whether they are good guys or bad guys.

It’s a fun, though disturbing, mystery to sit through, but ultimately, the implausible premise will keep this movie from being memorable.

Rated R for disturbing violence, language and some nudity.

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

Don Pedro Cruz is a local freelance writer and graphic designer. Send your comments to dpvc2000@gmail.com

Willows Theatre goes retro with ‘Sounds of the ’70s’

GARY CARR
Special to the Pioneer

Face it: You feel good in polyester. So, put on your leisure suit, wrap-around skirt and platform shoes and boogie down to 10 years of ground-breaking music.

Beginning March 15, the Willows Theatre Company brings back all the glitz and glamour of the go-go, disco, chest hair-and-chains decade with the musical revue “8-Track: The Sounds of the ’70s.” Live and onstage, the Willows revives the biggest hits of the Bee Gees, the Carpenters, Marvin Gaye and more.

The non-stop cascade of ’70s songs includes “Close to You,” “I Am Woman,” “Lady Marmalade,” “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover,” “I Write the Songs,” “We Are Family” and “Shake Your Booty.”

“8-Track” was conceived by Rick Seeber and directed by Richard Elliott, with musical direction by Timothy Hanson. Denver-based Seeber started on his “Sounds of the ’70s” project by compiling a list of 300 songs, then honed it down to 50 tunes.

“Everyone who grew up in the ’70s will get a trip back,” he says. “But people in their 20s and 30s will know it, too, because the music has never left us.”

Notice to twentysomethings: If you want to understand your parents, this is the show to see. Listen closely to the Starland Vocal Band’s “Afternoon Delight.” Maybe that’s how you got here.

“8-Track” plays March 15-April 18 at the Campbell Theatre, 636 Ward St., Martinez. For tickets, call 798-1300 or willowstheatre.org.

— Book Review —

History, religion blend well to tell Shira’s story



**CYNTHIA GREGORY
FOR THE BOOKS**

I used to think that historical novels were for sissies. But over the last couple of years, I’ve stumbled upon several books that have completely absorbed and fascinated me, and I have become a believer.

“The Fruit of Her Hands, the Story of Shira of Ashkenaz,” by Michelle Cameron is one such novel.

Medieval Europe was not a kind place. Oh sure, we like to attend Renaissance fairs and romanticize the lifestyles of the rich and historically infamous. Realistically, women died in childbirth. Most children born did not survive childhood. You baked your own bread, and grew

your own onions. If it was a bad growing season, you were hungry. Winters were brutal, transportation primitive and a day in the life of the ordinary citizen was an obstacle course to challenge the bravest heart.

One such heart belonged to young Shira, the educated and independent daughter of a scholarly rabbi. Her mother died when Shira was very young, and the townsfolk were scandalized that her father let Shira sit in on seminary classes that he taught in their home.

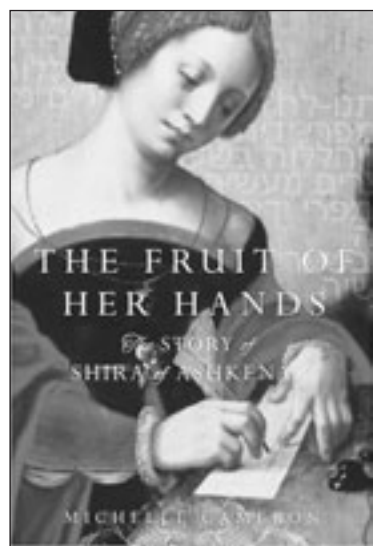
The temple elders paid a visit to Shira’s father. “This isn’t right,” they said. “You should marry,” they said. “Get a woman in the house who can take this girl in hand and teach her to be a proper daughter.”

Shira was lucky. Her stepmother was a kind soul and they helped each other along.

If you haven’t been exposed to the Jewish culture, as I hadn’t been, “The Fruit of Her Hands” will offer a lesson in a deeply spiritual community. The Ashkenazi Jews are descended from the Jewish communities settled along the Rhine in Germany. Grounded in tradition

and rooted in a deep and abiding faith, the Ashkenazi Jews knew their place in relation to their God, even when the world became a foreign place.

Shira was raised in Falaise, France, and married to her life partner in Paris, but she eventually raised her family in Germany. Exposed to the rising anti-Semitism of the time, Shira



and Meir ben Baruch stood steadfast in their faith.

Shira’s life was probably unexceptional in many ways from any other traditional

daughter, wife, mother, grandmother – except for being forced to whisper their prayers lest they fan the flames of hate, having to wear special garments that identified them as Jews, witnessing the burning of sacred texts in Paris, being arrested in London for the crime of a belief system and house arrest in Germany. Shira was able to withstand it all, with the extraordinary love she shared with her soulmate, Meir.

A well-researched novel, “The Fruit of Her Hands” brings vividly to life the challenges women have faced historically. Not only was Shira a wife first and then a mother, but as the spouse of a respected scholar, she was responsible for his students, her family’s and her culture’s well-being – and the flame of her faith, as well. If you’re looking for an inspired read, this is it.

Cynthia Gregory has won numerous awards for her short fiction. Her work has appeared in Glimmer Train Press, the Red Rock Review, Writer’s Digest, Black River Review, Briarcliff Review, Chicago Tribune, Bon Appetit, and the Herb Quarterly. You can write her at cgregory@aol.com.

Sr. Women, from page 12

Volunteer Center of the East Bay, gift wrapping during Christmas at Clayton Books and most recently, Project Haiti. Senior Women supported the French Club in a two-day, classroom-to-classroom effort – raising more than \$1,000 for earthquake relief in Haiti.

The annual fashion show is the largest Senior Women’s fundraiser. This year’s program is “Survival of the Fittest.”

Fashion show chair Laura Nguyen said the group solicited 30 retailers for donations of

current teen fashions for men and women. Fifteen stores are already on board and will donate six to eight outfits each.

All models are CVHS students who audition for the program and are chosen based on their walk and confidence. They are allowed to create a dance skit to debut their outfits at the show. The proceeds, ranging from \$1,800 to \$2,500, go toward three scholarships. The faculty advisor selects winners who exemplify Senior Women’s mission.

Laura says planning the fashion show is “definitely not easy ... but is very rewarding.”

To join Senior Women, students have to fill out an application and be interviewed. The group is looking for students who genuinely want to help the community and expect the applicant to express a project that would do just that. For example, Ashley would like to be involved with a world organization for children. Laura wants to organize a mini-carnival.

Ideal candidates have a high grade-point average, good attendance and participate in school and community events. Each

member has an opportunity to be in a leadership role as chair for a project, where she learns to take charge, identify details and delegate – skills critical to continued success in her education and career.

English teacher Hosay Jamili, the club’s advisor, says she has not had to step in at all for this year’s Senior Women. It is “truly refreshing to see these young ladies be independent.”

“Survival of the Fittest” is 7 p.m. Friday, March 19, in the large gym at CVHS, 1101 Alberta Way, Concord. Admission is \$5.

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