

ENTERTAINMENT

Jessica Lange left the ape behind her

by STEVEN MAZEY
Ottawa Citizen

Jessica Lange is proof that you can make your screen debut in the palm of a giant gorilla and still go on to get the last laugh.

Lange endured critical ridicule when she appeared in the hilariously awful 1976 re-make of King Kong. She spent most of her time wearing a slinky dress and screaming.

Five years later, Lange made audiences forget that embarrassment with bold, memorable performances in The Postman Always Rings Twice and Frances, and in 1982 she won a best-supporting actress Oscar for her performance in Tootsie.

She has just been nominated for an Academy Award for her performance in Blue Sky. The film, made three years ago but only released this year, was on movie screens for about a week. It was uneven, but Lange was astonishing as a woman trying to break out of the confines of her lonely, suffocating life on a military base in the 1960s.

VideoViews

Actress won respect with strong performances after the slinky-dress role in King

The performance displayed all of her strengths.

Lange radiates intelligence and energy in almost everything she does. She has a spark and a vibrancy that keeps you wondering what she's going to do next, and she's wonderfully real.

Rent any of the following films and see Lange at her best:

Sweet Dreams: (1985) The story of country singer Patsy Cline, it's a standard film biography, following Cline's ascent to stardom, her stormy marriage and her death in a plane crash. But the performances make the movie memorable. Lange brings humor, a toughness and independence to her performance as Cline, and she makes you smile. She also speaks

in a deep drawl that matches Cline's singing voice surprisingly well (Lange lip-syncs to Cline's songs).

Ed Harris is sharp and edgy as her husband, and Ann Wedgeworth is funny as Cline's mother, who just shakes her head at some of her daughter's behavior.

Tootsie: (1982) One of the better comedies of the 1980s, though Lange doesn't get any of the film's best lines, because she's meant to be the warm, down-to-earth core in a film full of neurotic characters who run around screaming. For anyone who lived on a remote island in the 1980s, Dustin Hoffman plays an unemployed actor who gets work as a soap opera actress after disguising himself as a woman. He falls in love with his co-star (Lange), who doesn't know he's a man. The movie has two execrable pop songs that accompany some montage scenes, but otherwise it holds up well.

Men Don't Leave: (1990) An overlooked film (the awful title didn't help) featuring some of

Lange's best work and strong performances by her co-stars. Lange plays a newly widowed woman who moves with her two sons from a small town to downtown Baltimore to try to start a new life. Unemployed and having a hard time finding a job, she goes through a lengthy depression before things start to turn around. The film is predictable, but there are some nice ideas and smartly-written scenes. Lange has some great moments, including one in which, losing all hope, she starts pitching muffins, one at a time, out of her apartment window. Joan Cusack is very funny as a young nurse who lives upstairs and starts dating the woman's teenage son.

Music Box: (1989) Costa-Gavras (Z, Missing) directed this finely wrought melodrama about a lawyer (Lange) who has to defend her Hungarian father (Armin Mueller-Stahl) against charges that he committed war crimes. As the trial goes on, she has increasing doubts about her father's inno-

cence. The film has some hard-to-believe coincidences as it progresses, but the performances and the taut pacing make it gripping, and it may be Lange's best work. She's completely believable as a woman who loves her father, and then starts to crumble as she discovers that he has been hiding a horrible past.

This week's new releases (With excerpts from original Citizen reviews.)

Andre: A family film starring Keith Carradine and Tina Majorino, based on a true story of a celebrity seal that made annual, well-publicized visits to Rockport, Maine for 23 years. "Animals, kids, a couple of gentle villains...Children under 12 will find it charming and enjoyable, provided they haven't been totally tainted by blood-and-guts action movies." (Chris Cobb)

Barcelona: A dry comedy about two self-centred American men and their experiences in

Barcelona. An American businessman living in the city is visited by his cousin, a U.S. navy officer. The film follows the culture clashes as the two men party, meet Spanish women and come to terms with their own pasts. "Stillman has created a quirky world and made it believable and funny...with dialogue that is hilarious, idiosyncratic and smart." (Jay Stone)

Sleep with Me: A romantic comedy about a twenty-something man (Craig Sheffer) who is in love with the girlfriend (Meg Tilly) of one of his best friends (Eric Stoltz). Director Rory Kelly has made "a Generation X comedy that spends most of its time smoking, moping, drinking and being ironic in a variety of social settings." The film offers "a comic edge that might remind you of Woody Allen minus the neurosis." (Stone)

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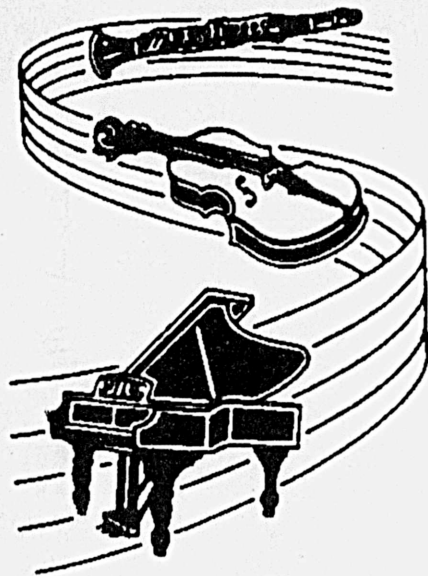
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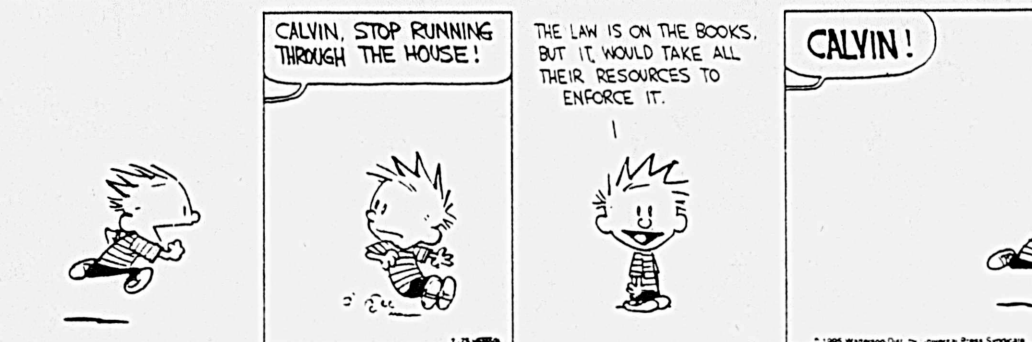
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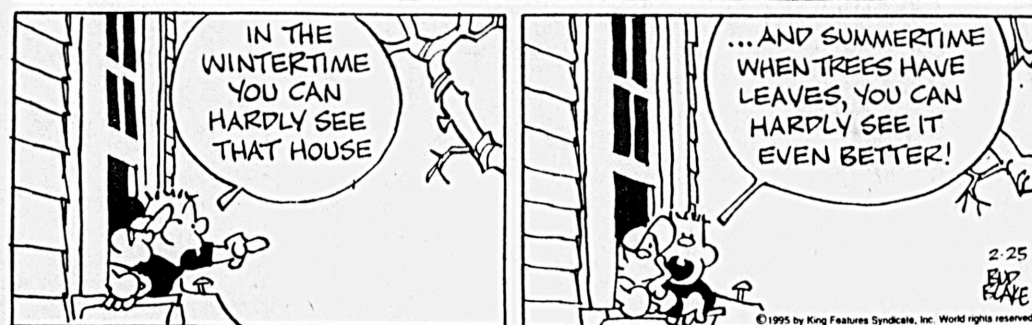
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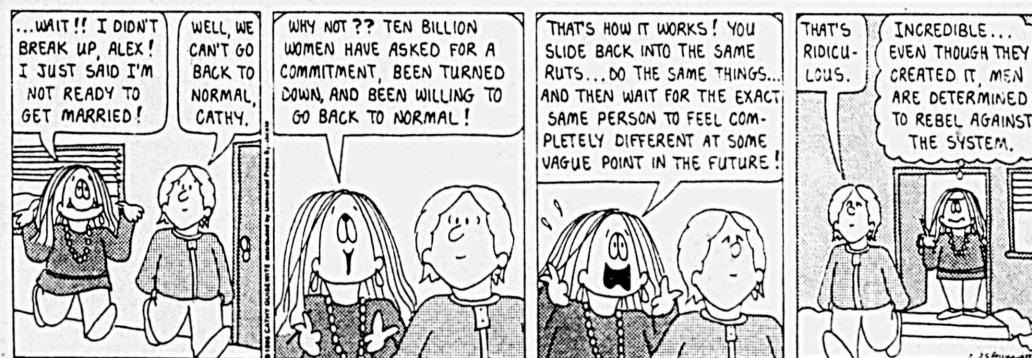
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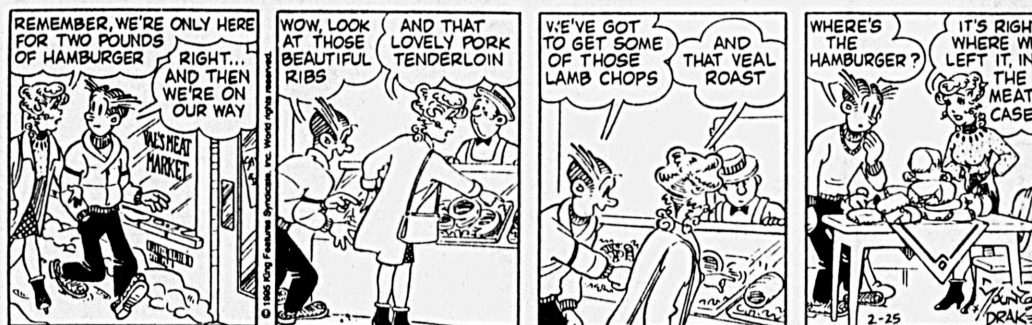
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