



MIKE LEIGH'S CHOICES

Radio Days

I'm not a fan of all Woody Allen's films, but I love this one. It's my go-to comfort movie. Savour its joyous kaleidoscopic cornucopia of characters and its feast of 1940s popular music. For me, it resonates with my lifetime in showbiz, as well as my post-war provincial Jewish childhood. Stanley Kubrick said it was like watching a home movie.

Mike Leigh

Radio Days could be seen as another version of *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, in which the creations of popular fiction not only light up humdrum lives but themselves take on a kind of humdrum reality, become part of the family. One could even see the new film as being the raw material out of which the earlier film had been developed: a sketchbook of (semi-) autobiography, Jewish family comedy and show-biz parody, all loosely related to the ambience of radio entertainment in the 30s and 40s, and out of which the movie-ambience joke, the Pirandellian whimsy, of *Purple Rose* might have been distilled. The back-to-front chronology of this would certainly be in keeping with the backwards-developing logic of Woody Allen's career, the way in which all his recent films seem to define themselves by refusing to define themselves in movie terms, unravelling the conventions of film comedy not in order to reinvent them but in order to preserve something essential about Allen's own comedy and persona that he doesn't quite trust to the safekeeping of the cinema. The 'disappearing' conceits of *Purple Rose* and *Zelig* are symptoms of a cinema that is itself always looking for a back exit, and might have found it in such a defiantly non-film, such a compendium of gags and period snapshots, as *Radio Days*.

It's no surprise either that this backward development, this devolving non-film, should have brought Allen so close to his beginnings, to his evolving pre-film, *Take the Money and Run*. The main advance that *Radio Days* has made over that novice work is its assurance that its halting, digressive formlessness doesn't matter. The sign of Allen's confidence as a filmmaker is a matter of voice, his own voice-over narration here, which supplies the continuity in this piecemeal account of Allen junior's upbringing and makes the comedy seem richer than it is, implying as it does the mature obsessions and neuroses towards which all these fledgling instances of sexual insecurity, hero worship and love of show-biz kitsch are headed. In this, Allen may have come up with one of the most effective uses of narrated cinema since the heyday of Orson Welles, because so much of the film is invested in the persona of the narrator, implying a development which doesn't have to be presented on screen. So many of the incidents in *Radio Days* could have appeared in any order because there is no inherent progression, even of the conventional 'coming of age' variety in this film's close cousin, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*.

Far from coming of age, Little Joe doesn't change at all in the some six years covered by the film. And such narrative continuities as Aunt Bea's hapless search for the right beau remain quite static, except where they serve – the trip to Radio City Music Hall, for instance – to flesh out the film's real subject, the show-biz biography of Woody Allen. Emotional continuities, perhaps,

count for more than narrative ones, with the ups and downs of family life described through the tunes and programmes associated with each member: the song that reminds Little Joe of his parents' anniversary, which was the only time he saw them kiss; or the 'heartache and problems' programme he imagines them taking part in ('I love him, but what did I do to deserve him?', says his mother of his father). But even the emotional trajectory becomes a little shaky when so many of these sketches veer off into (rather limp) gags only tangentially related to the family – Mr Zipsky's rampage through Rockaway centre with a meat cleaver, the outrage of the Communists' daughter kissing a black man that sends Mrs Silverman rigid with shock.

In some cases, the radio programmes and personalities are allowed a life of their own within the film, their interest again lying mostly in the way they fill in Allen's creative hinterland, suggesting how the corniest conventions of this pre-pubescent entertainment might have supplied the inspiration for some of his later films. The most neatly turned of these sequences, the Sports Legends account of pitcher Kirby Kyle, whose loss of limbs in no way diminished his 'heart', has the epigrammatic absurdity of *Zelig*. And the most extended, the rise to radio stardom of Mia Farrow's cigarette girl, ending with the New Year's party she hosts with such immortals as the Masked Avenger and Biff Baxter, is a good-natured 'lives of the entertainers' parody like *Broadway Danny Rose*.

These sequences also have a 'finished' quality that makes much of the surrounding material to do with the family look rather desultory and pointless – even such a potentially nice joke as Bea's ardent date being frightened off by Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* broadcast never really seems to arrive at its punch-line. It is perhaps no accident that Allen begins the film with one of his best – though most tangential – jokes, about the burglars who bring their victims an unexpected windfall. Nor that this depends on their guessing three tunes that neatly illustrate the musical range of the soundtrack accompaniment that follows – the Big Band sound of 'Dancing in the Dark', the jazzy 'Chinatown, My Chinatown', the folksy 'Sailor's Hornpipe' – and that is itself one of the film's best and most cohesive features.

Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, July 1987

RADIO DAYS

Director: Woody Allen
©/Production Company: Orion Pictures Corporation
Executive Producers: Jack Rollins, Charles H. Joffe
Producers: Robert Greenhut, Gail Sicilia
Associate Producer: Ezra Swerdlow
Production Associate: Joseph Hartwick
Production Manager: Thomas Reilly
Production Co-ordinator: Helen Robin
Art Department Research: Glenn Lloyd
Assistant Directors: Ezra Swerdlow, Ken Ornstein
Casting: Juliet Taylor
Associate Casting: Ellen Lewis
Additional Casting: Todd Thaler
Screenplay: Woody Allen
Director of Photography: Carlo Di Palma
Camera Operator: Dick Mingalone
Optical Effects: R/Greenberg Associates
Editor: Susan E. Morse
Production Designer: Santo Loquasto
Art Director: Speed Hopkins
Set Decorators: Carol Joffe, Leslie Bloom
Set Dresser: David Weinman
Master Scenic Artist: James Sorice
Costume Designer: Jeffrey Kurland
Men's Wardrobe Supervisor: Bill Christians
Women's Wardrobe Supervisor: Patricia Eiben
Make-up: Fern Buchner
Titles: The Optical House
Music Supervisor: Dick Hyman
Musicians Co-ordinator: Joe Malin
Music Recording: Roy B. Yokelson
Music Recording Supervisors: Walt Levinsky, Sam Parkins
Vocal Coach for Ms Keaton & Ms Farrow: Janet Frank
Sound Recording: James Sabat, Frank Graziadei
Sound Re-recording: Lee Dichter, Sound One
Supervising Sound Editor: Bob Hein
Sound Editor: Michael Moyses

Cast

Seth Green (*Little Joe*)
Julie Kavner (*mother*)
Michael Tucker (*father*)
Dianne Wiest (*Aunt Bea*)
Josh Mostel (*Uncle Abe*)
Renee Lippin (*Aunt Ceil*)
William Magerman (*grandpa*)
Leah Carrey (*grandma*)
Joy Newman (*Ruthie*)
Mia Farrow (*Sally White*)
Julie Kurnitz (*Irene*)
David Warrilow (*Roger*)
Wallace Shawn (*Masked Avenger*)
Kenneth Mars (*Rabbi Baumel*)
Jeff Daniels (*Biff Baxter*)
Danny Aiello (*Rocco*)
Gina Deangelis (*Rocco's mother*)
Tony Roberts (*'Silver Dollar' Emcee*)
Diane Keaton (*New Year's Singer*)
Guy Lebow (*Bill Kern*)
Marc Colner (*whiz kid*)
Richard Portnow (*Sy*)
Roger Hammer (*Richard*)
Mike Starr, Paul Herman (*burglars*)

Don Pardo (*'Guess That Tune' Host*)
Martin Rosenblatt (*Mr Needleman*)
Helen Miller (*Mrs Needleman*)
Danielle Ferland (*child star*)
Michael Murray (*Avenger Crook*)
William Flanagan (*Avenger announcer*)
Hy Anzell (*Mr Waldbaum*)
Judith Malina (*Mrs Waldbaum*)
Fletcher Farrow Previn (*Andrew*)
Oliver Block (*Nick*)
Maurice Toueg (*Dave*)
Sal Tuminello (*Burt*)
Rebecca Nickels (*Evelyn Goorwitz*)
Mindy Morgenstern (*'Show and Tell' teacher*)
David Mosberg (*Arnold*)
Ross Morgenstern (*Ross*)
Andy Clark (*Sidney Manulis*)
Lee Erwin (*roller rink organist*)
Terry Lee Swarts, Margaret Thomson (*night-club customers*)
Tito Puente (*Latin bandleader*)
Denise Dummont (*Latin singer*)
Dimitri Vassilopoulos (*Porfirio*)
Larry David (*communist neighbour*)
Rebecca Schaeffer (*communist's daughter*)
Belle Berger (*Mrs Silverman*)
Brian Mannain (*Kirby Kyle*)
Stan Burns (*ventriloquist*)
Todd Field (*crooner*)
Peter Lombard (*Abercrombie host*)
Martin Sherman (*Mr Abercrombie*)
Crystal Field (*Abercrombie couple*)
Roberta Bennett (*teacher with carrot*)
Joel Eidelsberg (*Mr Zipsky*)
Peter Castellotti (*Mr Davis*)
Shelley Delaney (*Chekhov actress*)
Dwight Weist (*Pearl Harbour announcer*)
Ken Levinsky, Ray Marchica (*USO Musicians*)
J.R. Horne (*Biff announcer*)
Kuno Sponholz (*German*)
Henry Yuk (*Japanese*)
Sydney A. Blake (*Miss Gordon*)
Kitty Carlisle Hart (*radio singer*)
Robert Joy (*Fred*)
Henry Cowen (*principal*)
Philip Shultz (*whistler*)
Mercedes Ruehl, Bruce Jarchow (*ad men*)
Greg Gerard (*songwriter*)
David Cale (*director*)
Ira B. Wheeler (*sponsor*)
Hannah Rabinowitz (*sponsor's wife*)
Edward S. Kotkin (*diction teacher*)
Ruby Payne, Jaqui Safra (*diction students*)
Paul Berman (*'Gay White Way' announcer*)
Barbara Gallo, Jane Jarvis, Liz Vohecowicz (*Dance Palace musician*)
Ivan Kronenfeld (*on-the-spot newsman*)
Frank O'Brien (*fireman*)
Yolanda Childress (*Polly's mother*)
Artie Bulter (*new year's bandleader*)
Gregg Almquist, Jackson Beck, Wendell Craig, William H. Macy, Ken Roberts, Norman Rose, Kenneth Welsh (*radio voices*)

USA 1987

88 mins

MIKE LEIGH'S CHOICES

Radio Days Sat 23 Oct 13:20; Tue 16 Nov 18:10

H3 Mon 25 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with director Les Blair); Wed 24 Nov 20:50

A Blonde in Love (AKA Loves of a Blonde) (Lásky jedné plavovlásky)

Mon 25 Oct 20:40; Fri 19 Nov 21:00

The Tree of Wooden Clogs (L'albero degli zoccoli)

Fri 29 Oct 13:30; Sun 7 Nov 13:50

Jules et Jim Wed 10 Nov 14:30

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

Sat 13 Nov 14:10; Tue 30 Nov 14:00

I Am Cuba (Soy Cuba) Sat 13 Nov 20:10

The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan Sun 14 Nov 14:40; Sun 28 Nov 14:50

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