



MUSICAL OF THE SPHERES

Rating: *October 12, 2001* -- **The American Astronaut - 2 1/2 Stars**

A micro-budget black-and-white musical set in outer space, "The American Astronaut" is obviously not for all tastes - but it's quite unlike anything else out there at the moment.

It's an auspicious feature debut by director Cory McAbee, frontman for the experimental rock band the Billy Naylor Show. McAbee plays Samuel Curtis, a sort of futuristic FedEx man who arrives to make pickups on a distant asteroid.

Samuel enters an all-male two-step dance competition at a rundown bar with the Blueberry Pirate (Joshua Taylor).

The Pirate wants Samuel to transport a male to an all-female planet - despite the opposition of the mad scientist Professor Hess (Rocco Sisto).

Though it fails to live up to the fun in its opening reels, this Sundance Film Festival favorite has wonderfully off-the-wall numbers, especially one called "The Boy Who Once Saw a Woman's Breast."

Running time: 94 minutes. Not rated (violence, profanity). At the Angelika, Houston and Mercer streets.

- Lou Lumenick

THE OPERATOR - 2 1/2 Stars

'THE Operator' is a nifty little indie sleeper about a sleazy Houston lawyer (Michael Laurence, whose raspy voice sounds remarkably like Bill Clinton's) who verbally abuses the wrong telephone operator.

The unnamed operator (Jacqueline Kim, who's never seen full-face) decides to teach him a lesson. And how.

She slowly destroys the lawyer's life by canceling his credit cards, wising up his cuckolded wife, causing problems with gambling debts (to an unlikely bookie played by the ubiquitous Steve Tobolowsky) and sabotaging his defense of a criminal businessman (veteran character actor Brion James in his final role before his death).

The performances are so solid - and newcomer Jon Dichter's direction (he also wrote the script) is so utterly assured - that the rather contrived ending barely seems to detract from the film's entertainment value.

Running time: 102 minutes. Not rated (violence, profanity, sex). At the Angelika, East Houston and Mercer streets.

- Lumenick

JAILS, HOSPITALS & HIP-HOP - 2 1/2 Stars

BRONX-born comedian Danny Hoch is a funny guy with many personalities.

In this amusing movie - an adaptation of his 1998 stage show - he shows off a variety of personas, including a prison guard, a white rapper, a man on crutches and a mentally limited fellow.

While some of this white guy's humor is juvenile and in questionable taste, Hoch, for the most part, is able to pull it off and supply a frequent number of laughs.

Running time: 90 minutes. Rated: R (strong language). At the Village East, Second Avenue and 12th Street.

- V.A. Musetto

GRATEFUL DAWG - 2 1/2 Stars

'GRATEFUL Dawg' is essentially a glorified home movie by Gillian Grisman, the daughter of noted mandolinist David Grisman, who collaborated with Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead over three decades.

This delightfully unpretentious documentary presents some terrific performance footage of the two men, who met at a bluegrass festival in Pennsylvania in 1964 and joined together in two separate bands in the '70s and '90s. (They didn't speak for a lengthy period in between because of a business dispute.)

Though there are moderately interesting interviews interspersed throughout, Deadheads will want to see the numbers, in which Grisman's more formal style complements Garcia's looser approach to his music.

At Grisman's father's insistence, they are presented in full and without interruption.

Running time: 80 minutes. Rated PG-13 (moderate profanity). At Cinema Village, East 12th Street, between Fifth Avenue and University Place.

- Lumenick

[Home](#)

NEW YORK POST is a registered trademark of NYP Holdings, Inc. NYPOST.COM, NYPOSTONLINE.COM, and NEWYORKPOST.COM are trademarks of NYP Holdings, Inc. Copyright 2004 NYP Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.