Angela Bonavoglia

Added to the fine performances of Diane Keaton in Shoot the Moon, Sissy Spacek in Missing, and Glenn Close and Mary Beth Hurt in The World According to Garp, a year-end film bonanza rescued us from ET's index finger and a spate of mildly artistic (Diner) to truly disgusting (Porky's) male buddy films. Ranging from the wildly farcical to the explosively dramatic and sure to capture Academy Award attention, these films featured women-centered subjects and sterling female directorial as well as acting performances.

TOOTSIE

The irony is that 1982's most celebrated woman's role may have been played by a man: Dustin Hoffman in drag in **Tootsie**. Captivating and hilarious, **Tootsie** features a temperamental, unemployed actor, Michael Dorsey (Dustin Hoffman), who decides to dress like a woman to get work. He winds up a female soap opera hero, an outspoken hospital administrator who bops a lecherous physician on the head; advises an abused woman patient to forget about getting counseling at a shelter and to hurl a heavy planter at her husband instead; and announces to the sexist soap director: "My name is not Tootsie. Tom is always Tom. John is always John. My name is Dorothy. Capital D-o-r-o-t-h-y." Her antics on the set are always extemporaneous and, in this make-believe world, so effective that the director can only opt to air them.

Trouble brews when Dorothy falls in love with Julie, a nurse in the soap (Jessica Lange), turning the film into a touching, even poignant love story of sorts. By press accounts, this was director Sydney Pollack's vision, challenged somewhat by Hoffman who wanted a greater smattering of bathroom jokes. Pollack also stars in the film, the picture of perpetual exasperation as Dorsey's agent, though the real show stopper among the supporting cast is Bill Murray as the deadpan playwright observing his roommate Dorsey go mad.

It is noteworthy, of course, that no middle-aged, unglamorous, downright aggressive female actress would have been (a) so warmly received by audiences as Dorothy or, (b) allowed to look the way Hoffman looked and land a central role in a feature film. The main female character in the film, Julie, is irritating, though Jessica Lange does the best she can as the dizzy, saccharine, naive, vacuous gorgeous-young--thing. The confident, likeable, no-nonsense female executive producer of the soap, however, is something of a breakthrough portrayal. The parallelism between the soap director's bad treatment of girlfriend Julie and Dorsey's bad treatment of girlfriend Sandi (Teri Garr) is good, adding depth to Dorsey's enlightenment, having shown him to be as much a perpetrator of male prerogatives in relationships as the next guy.

In the end, **Tootsie** represents a little revolution. We still live in a society where many men cannot imagine a worse insult than to be accused of being like a woman. Yet, at the close of this film, Dorsey recalls the hours he spent with Julie as Dorothy and confesses to her: "I was a better man with you as a woman than I ever was with a woman as a man."

SMITHEREENS

Twenty-nine-year old Susan Seidelman was the only American and the only woman director in the 1982 Cannes film festival's main competition. The entry of her film, **Smithereens**, also marked the first time that an independently produced first feature was accepted for the main event. As if that were not enough, in this era of $12 million productions, she made her film for just $100,000.

Smithereens is an engrossing, funny, rueful look at the meanderings of a 19-year-old former New Jerseyite named Wren, played with verve, sass and tenderness by Susan Berman. Struggling to break into the New York City New Wave rock scene, she makes her debut in giant, plaid-framed dark glasses, a checkered, vinyl mini skirt, silver high heels, and black fishnet stockings with seams. She is hanging up her photostated picture all over the subways.

Looking to become a road manager--sans MBA, music or even job experience—Wren becomes involved with Paul (Brad Rinn), a gentle vagabond from Montana who lives in his immobile purple van parked in the bombed-out territory along the Hudson, and Eric (Richard Hell, an originator of New Wave music), a rock star and irresponsible opportunist who demonstrates what Wren might, if she keeps at it, become.

In the tradition of the small movie, **Smithereens** focuses as much on the milieu and indigenous characters as on Wren. In one scene, illustrating Seidelman's wizardry at juxtaposing disparate elements to make her points, a neighborhood prostitute approaches Paul's van and ask him if he wants to have

SUSAN BERMAN as Wren in Smithereens.