Motion Picture Successes--Financial and Critical

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by

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Central Idea: Certain traits are characteristic of films that achieve financial success and critical success.

Introduction: Some films are financial successes, some films are critical successes, but few are both.

I. What is a successful film?
   A. Financial success
   B. Critical success

II. Which films are financial successes?
   A. Film genres and trends
   B. Film stars and directors
   C. The effects of an era's morals and tastes on what films are financially successful

III. Which films are critical successes?
   A. Film genres and trends
   B. Film stars and directors
   C. The effects of an era's morals and tastes on what films are critical successes

IV. Which films are both financial and critical successes?
   A. Film genres and trends
   B. Stars and directors
   C. The effects of an era's morals and tastes on what films are both financial and critical successes
D. What are the effects of financial and critical success on one another?

V. How well film awards reflect financial and critical success
   A. The Academy Awards
   B. People's Choice Awards
   C. Informal movie poll taken at Ball State campus

VI. Predictions of upcoming films with regard to potential financial and critical success

VII. Why gaps exist between financial and critical success

Conclusion: In the long run, critical successes are remembered longer by audiences than financial successes.
Motion Picture Successes--Financial and Critical

The creators of every film want their film to be a "success." The film can become a financial success by attracting a large audience and making a lot of money. The film can become a critical success when movie reviewers give the film a favorable rating, referring to it as "brilliant" or "a classic." Most films attempt to achieve both types of success, although few actually do.

Financially-successful films are basically those films to which most people go. Dollar amounts change from year to year, but a financial success must be a motion picture which not only makes back its cost, but also returns a considerable profit. The dollar amounts change as a result of such factors as inflation and rising film costs. When considering the point at which a film makes a profit, one must take into consideration the costs of the actual film (director, actors, technicians, script, sets, costumes, and other costs), the cost of advertising the film, and the share of the profits that go to the individual theatre owners.

A critically-successful film is one which the nation's (and world's) critics generally agree is well-made and "has something to say." Rarely does a film earn rave reviews from all of the nation's leading critics, but definite trends in the reviews do occur. Referring to *The Right Stuff* (1983), which was about...
America's first astronauts, People magazine said, "Exhilarating. The acting is splendid," Roger Ebert, of the Chicago Sun-Times, said, "a daring blend of styles, from social satire to historical reconstruction to flat-out space opera," and Newsweek's David Ansen called it "the American movie of the year." Less impressed with Daniel (1983), about the children of Communist sympathizers, People stated, "if good intentions were enough for a movie, Daniel would be an instant classic." Ebert noted, "the film, in the end, doesn't even let us know whether or not (the parents) were good or bad," and Ansen admits, "Daniel, despite flashes of brilliance, stubbornly refuses to come alive." Finally, in criticizing the dance film Staying Alive (1982), People claims, "for the Staying Alive audience, the problem is staying awake." Ebert calls it "an endless series of musical interludes between dramatic scenes that aren't there," and Ansen declares, "rarely has a sequel so


conscientiously obliterated all the virtues of the original."9

While no film style has always been the "biggest money-making genre," two styles have been in generally constant favor with the ticket-buying public: epics and comedies. Epics typically have many factors which appeal to audiences, such as expensive sets and costumes, "grand-scale" cinematography, biblical and historical settings, dramatic musical scores, and attractive, heroic leading characters. Comedies offer audiences favorite comics and a chance to "laugh their troubles away."

Epic films have been attracting huge audiences since the days of the Italian Sabinia films (1914-1928) and D. W. Griffith's historical epics of the 1910s (particularly his Civil War classic, The Birth of a Nation (1915), which is the film most often singled out as bringing worldwide attention and respect to motion pictures). Cecil B. De Mille received international recognition for his lavish (and often sensual) biblical epics of the 1920s and 1930s, like The Ten Commandments (1923), King of Kings (1927), The Sign of the Cross (1932), and Cleopatra (1934). Epic films "came into their own" during the post-World War II period with such financial smashes as The Robe (1953), the remake of The Ten Commandments (1956), Around the World in 80 Days (1956), and Ben-Hur (1959).

While film comedy, the other perennial audience favorite, has changed during its (approximately) 80-year history, barely a

year goes by when not at least 3 or 4 comedies make the top 10 in Variety's annual list of the year's biggest money-makers. In the 1910s and 1920s, silent comedians such as Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and the Mack Sennett troupe made classic comedies that could "speak" to a multi-lingual worldwide audience, and Charlie Chaplin was able to become perhaps the most well-known international movie star of all time.

Sound in motion picture comedies ushered in many new comedy styles. Now were screwball comedies, such as It Happened One Night (1934), My Man Godfrey (1936), and Bringing Up Baby (1938), which all featured witty people in crazy situations. The highly successful, highly verbal "personality comedians," such as W. C. Fields, Mae West, and the Marx Brothers, emerged at about the same time as the screwball comedies. World War II inspired a new era of film comedy, with highlights like Buck Privates (1941), My Favorite Blonde (1942), I Was a Male War Bride (1942), Mr. Roberts (1955), and The Teahouse of the August Moon (1956). Recent film comedies often feature social cynicism and profane humor, greatly influenced by the TV show "Saturday Night Live," and include the major hits National Lampoon's Animal House (1978), The Jerk (1979), Stripes (1981), National Lampoon's Vacation (1983), and Trading Places (1983).

Many movie-goers will attend a film if a certain actor or actress is in it or if a favorite director directed it. Acting ability and good reviews are not a prerequisite for a performer to become a top draw (exemplified by the continuing success of Richard Pryor), but a definite image that appeals to audiences is almost always necessary. A list of the top 10 box-office stars
up to 1980 reflects such "identifiable types" as John Wayne (tough and All-American), Gary Cooper (honest), Bing Crosby (easy-going crooner), Clark Gable (masculine individualist), Clint Eastwood (strong and silent), Bob Hope (wisecracking narcissist), Paul Newman (self-confident outcast), Doris Day (spunky), Rock Hudson (manly), and Cary Grant (elegant and witty). A prime example of a modern director with box office appeal is Steven Spielberg, who directed 4 of the top 10 highest-grossing films of the past 10 years (Jaws (1975), Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981), and E. T.--The Extra-Terrestrial (1982)).

As mentioned before, no single type of movie has remained the one which most audience members attend. Many of the changes in attendance patterns have to do with the changes in film technology and with the ever-changing "attitudinal climate" in the world. This has caused "up and down" cycles in many film styles and their ability to succeed financially.

In the early days of motion pictures, audiences were attracted to the technical gimmickry in films, such as the surrealist effects in Melies's A Trip to the Moon (1902). After the public became used to the mere fact of images moving on a screen, they demanded that the films also tell stories, a phenomenon believed to have been started by The Great Train Robbery (1903). Since

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films did not yet have "voices," almost all comedy successes of the silent period featured much physical, "slapstick" humor. While pre-World War I films reflected post-Victorian morals with stars like Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish, the more cynical post-war era featured more risque films with openly sexy stars, such as Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, Clara Bow, Ramon Novarro, and Joan Crawford.

When sound came to mainstream films in the late 1920s, the studios (and audiences) realized that movies could not only "talk," but could also "sing" for the first time (technically, films could already "dance" during the silent era). This resulted in dozens of musicals being released during the 1927-1931 period. Some were classics, including The Jazz Singer (1927), Broadway Melody (1929), and Applause (1929), but most were reworkings of the big musicals or were "reviews" featuring any available singing-and-dancing talent.

Never matching the large quantity of musicals made during those early years, a handful of musicals each year have nonetheless been able to make respectable profits. A particularly interesting period was the 1960s, when several expensive Broadway-based musicals became financial blockbusters (West Side Story (1961), The Sound of Music (1965), and Penny Girl (1968)), while other expensive Broadway-based musicals made very little money (Flower Drum Song (1961), Billy Rose's Jumbo (1962), Finian's Rainbow (1968), and Paint Your Wagon (1969)).

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Horror films have a "come and go" history at the box office. Horror successes date back to silent hits such as the German expressionistic films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *Nosferatu* (1922) and two of Lon Chaney's many successes, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). The "classic" era of early sound horror hits includes *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932), and *King Kong* (1933). This group of films still attracts audiences to film revivals and amasses large ratings when shown on TV (usually late at night).

The 1950s saw a resurgence of horror films in 2 styles: the literate Vincent Price thrillers and horror stories about nuclear-age mutants. The Price films, which were often based on stories by Edgar Allan Poe, include *House of Wax* (1953), *The House on Haunted Hill* (1959), and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1959). The "mutant" movies, which were sometimes seen as metaphors about the possible dangers of atomic energy, include *The Thing* (1951), *Them* (1954), and *Godzilla* (1956).

The horror films that make money in today's cinema tend to feature more graphic violence than those of the past. The smash hit *The Exorcist* (1973), about a young girl possessed by the devil, prompted a whole series of "demon films," including *The Omen* (1976), *Carrie* (1976), and *The Amityville Horror* (1979). Today, the most profitable horror films are the gory, low-budget "dead teenager" films (as critics Gene Siskal and Roger Ebert refer to them) and are typically such mindlessly bloody films like *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* movies.
"Cops-and-robbers" films have been around since the 1910s, but there have been times when they were more successful than at other times. The "cops" are well-represented by several long-running detective series such as those about Bulldog Drummond (1919-1951), the Thin Man (1934-1947), Charlie Chan (1926-1949), Philo Vance (1929-1947), Mr. Moto (1937-1939), and, most successfully, James Bond (1963- ). While these series spread themselves over long periods of time, the 1940s provided many successful detective films within a short period of time, including The Maltese Falcon (1941), Murder, My Sweet (1944), and The Big Sleep (1946).

Crime films have been around since The Great Train Robbery (1903). The first era when crime films became very popular was the early 1930s (before the restrictive Production Code took effect), when such realistic, gritty films as Little Caesar (1930), Public Enemy (1931), and Scarface (1932) became major hits. The genre had only intermittent success after that until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the "counterculture" proved to be a substantial audience for such anti-authority figures as Bonnie and Clyde (1967), Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969), and The Godfather (1972).

The 1950s saw a sort of return to the days of Melies and the thrill with technical achievements in films. One of the developments that attracted audiences was Cinerama, which filmed its scenes with 3 cameras and showed them with 3 projectors aimed at 3 adjacent screens, which formed a kind of semicircle around the audience. The first 3 films in Cinerama (This is Cinerama (1952),
Cinerama Holiday (1955), and The Seven Wonders of the World (1956) were huge successes commercially, but the process was expensive and cumbersome to film and the necessary projecting equipment and multiple screens proved too costly for many theatre-owners. Also, the spectacular effects often detracted from "plot" films, such as How the West Was Won (1963) and It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963).

Cinemascope also emerged during the 1950s. Cinemascope (and its imitators) created a wide-screen effect by using a special wide lens camera to shoot the film, shrinking it down to normal film width so it would fit into projectors, and projecting it back to its normal proportions onto a large, wrap-around screen with a special projecting lens. The initial Cinemascope film, The Robe (1953), was a huge success, but (like with Cinerama) the process soon became too costly for many theatre-owners. Also, the very wide Cinemascope images were impossible to completely fit onto a TV screen, which was an ever-growing market for films past their second and third runs.

A third innovation was 3-D. This 3-dimensional process was created by filming the same scene from 2 slightly different angles and projecting them simultaneously onto the same screen. Viewers had to wear special glasses (1 red lens and 1 green lens) to see the effect. Although there were initial 3-D successes (Bwana Devil (1952) and House of Wax (1953)), later 3-D films like Kiss Me Kate (1953) and Dial M For Murder (1954) were subsequently released in regular "2-D." This was because audiences got tired of wearing the uncomfortable 3-D glasses to view the 3-D
effects, which were not always easy to see. While 3-D disappeared quickly enough to make it seem a "flash in the pan," it reemerged in the 1980s as a way to enhance cheap teenage horror films, like Jaws 3-D (1983) and Amityville 3-D (1983).

For the first few decades of the cinema, western films were a screen staple and considered the "bread and butter" (regularly released low-budget moneymakers) of many studios. While box-office bonanzas like The Covered Wagon (1923) and Duel in the Sun (1946) were more the exception than the rule, westerns could usually be depended on to make a profit. Only in the past 15 years or so have westerns become "box-office poison," exemplified by the financial failure of such big-budget westerns as Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (1973), The Missouri Breaks (1976), Comes a Horseman (1978), and The Long Riders (1980).

In contrast with the diverse types of films that are financially successful, there are certain kinds of films that tend to garner most of the critical attention. In particular, "human dramas," such as the acclaimed Marty (1955), Kramer vs. Kramer (1979), and Terms of Endearment (1983), often emerge as the films about which critics are most enthusiastic. In a similar vein, biographies, such as The Life of Emile Zola (1937), Madame Curie (1943), and Patton (1970), are nearly always reviewed favorably. By their very nature, these types of films deal with human problems and emotions, and critics usually prefer those qualities over technical expertise or outrageous situations.

A third kind of film which often inspires critical praise is the epic. These films often feature high-minded, heroic leading
characters whose "style" the film captures, as was the case with The Inn of the Sixth Happiness (1947), Lawrence of Arabia (1962), and Gandhi (1982). Critics take note of the ideals (and technical expertise) of apices and respond with favorable comments.

Just as there are "big box-office" stars and directors, there are performers and directors whose films nearly always receive critical praise (and awards). In contrast with the "identifiable types" that top the box-office lists, most critically-acclaimed performers have a chameleon-like talent for changing personality from film to film. Paul Muni was an ape-like gangster in Scarface (1932), a bitter, "framed," convict in I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932), a persistent French scientist in The Story of Louis Pasteur (1936), and a Chinese peasant in The Good Earth (1937). Bette Davis appeared as a small-town waitress in The Petrified Forest (1936), a hard-boiled dance hall girl in Marked Woman (1938), a flirtatious southern belle in Jezebel (1938), and a frumpy, repressed daughter in Now, Voyager (1942). Robert DeNiro starred as an Italian mafia boss in The Godfather Part II (1974), a violent, obsessed New York cabby in Taxi Driver (1976), a loud-mouthed boxer in Raging Bull (1980), and an aspiring comedian in The King of Comedy (1982). Meryl Streep performed as a sophisticated, well-educated New Yorker in Kramer vs. Kramer (1979), a mysterious 19th-century Englishwoman in The French Lieutenant's Woman (1981), a haunted Polish concentration camp survivor in Sophie's Choice (1982), and a southern nuclear plant worker in Silkwood (1983).

Even though human dramas, biographies, and epics tend to
dominate the film awards most years, the era in which a film is
released seems to have an effect on its critical reception.
Broadway Melody won the Best Picture Oscar for 1929-30 (and un-
deniably did help to progress the musical film form), but it is
seen today by most critics (and audiences) as a somewhat trite and
familiar backstage musical. Largely ignored in the same year was
Abel Gance's Napoléon (1928), which recently had a hugely-suc-
cessful re-release across the United States, complete with full
orchestra and critical raves.

A similar reversal of critics' views has occurred with certain
films of the post-World War II period. Films like Home of the
Brave (1949), The Moon is Blue (1953), and Tea and Sympathy (1956)
were at the time acclaimed as bold and progressive for tackling
controversial subjects (racism, sexual promiscuity, and homosex-
uality, respectively). They now seem to have evaded their "causes"
in favor of furthering dated, melodramatic plotlines and of not
offending audiences. At the same time, critics dismissed many of
Gene Kelly's MGM musicals like The Pirate (1948) and Invitation to
the Dance (1956) as "strange" and "arty," while those films today
are praised as innovative and "ahead of their time."

From the above evidence, it is obvious that certain types of
films tend to have a better chance than other films of receiving
both financial and critical success. Epic films usually stand
the best chance of achieving both types of success, with their
combinations of top stars, historical (often biblical) settings,
lush sets, and exotic costumes attracting the "average movie-
goer" and their ideals and narrative styles attracting the critics.
Also, most of the human dramas that receive wide critical success are able to become financial successes, too. This is often the result of critical praise being mentioned in the films' advertising.

For performers and directors, box-office attraction and critical attention are not mutually exclusive. Gary Cooper is second on the list of all-time box-office stars, yet he also has 2 Academy Awards and 3 other nominations. Paul Newman is seventh on the box-office list, and still his stage experience and intense performances have netted him 6 Oscar nominations. Previously mentioned as a director with box-office appeal, Steven Spielberg's 3 Oscar nominations certainly attest to his respect from the critics.

As audiences' tastes change, their reactions to critical successes can range from apathy to heavy attendance. In 1981, for example, critics raved over such films as Raiders of the Lost Ark, On Golden Pond, Superman II, and Arthur, and audiences agreed by turning them into financial successes. The same year, comparable notices greeted Reds, which did not even make enough money to pay for its expensive production and advertising costs. Award-winning 1983 movies like Atlantic City, Prince of the City, and My Dinner With Andre made little money at all, and had trouble getting bookings even in major cities.

In turn, audiences have both agreed with critical pans and stayed away from poorly-rated films and have ignored the critics and turned critical "losers" into financial "winners." Again looking at 1981, the large profits gained by The Cannonball Run, Stripes, and Tarzan, The Ape Man defied critical slams. On the other hand, neither critics nor audiences seemed to care
much for *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, *Under the Rainbow*, *The Legend of the Lone Ranger*, and *Heaven's Gate*.

Either critical acclaim or heavy profits can help a film achieve success in the other category. After their Oscar wins, *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Ordinary People* (1980) doubled their incomes, while *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) increased its gross by 70%.\(^\text{12}\) Conversely, the huge profits of *Jaws* (1975) helped critics to recognize it as superior to the dozens of other "post-Exorcist" horror films of the time.

Of the many film awards that are given out each year, the Academy Awards are by far the most well-known and widely respected. The 56-year-old awards are viewed each year by an estimated television audience of 500,000,000 people. Those films which win Academy Awards, or Oscars, advertise their awards in newspapers and on television and usually succeed in bringing in several million dollars worth of additional business.

While an Academy Award usually means extra profits for a film, the Oscars hardly represent a perfect union of financial and critical success. Looking over the 13 films which have won 7 or more Oscars, there are indeed 2 "blockbusters" (*Gone With the Wind* (1939) and *Ben-Hur* (1959)) and 5 major financial hits (*From Here to Eternity* (1953), *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *West Side Story* (1961), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), and *The Sting* (1973)).

Gigi (1958), My Fair Lady (1964), Patton (1970), Cabaret (1972), and Gandhi (1982) were financially successful, although not overwhelmingly so, and On the Waterfront (1954) was really not a financial success. In addition, such huge money-makers as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), This Is the Army (1943), Duel in the Sun (1946), South Pacific (1958), It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963), Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), Grease (1978), and Return of the Jedi (1983) were not even nominated for Best Picture, while such Best Picture winners like Hamlet (1948), Marty (1955), and Annie Hall (1977) made only marginal rents in the nation's theatre cashboxes.

In 1975, the People's Choice Awards were established. The awards committee polls thousands of Americans about their favorites in motion pictures (as well as in television and music) and presents the winners with their trophies on a network television special. The purpose of the People's Choice Awards seems to be to reflect the favorites of the "typical audience member" and not some "kibalutin Hollywood critics." The winners of the Favorite Motion Picture award (Jaws-1975 award, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest-1976 award, Star Wars-1977 award, Grease-1978 award, Rocky II-1979 award, The Empire Strikes Back-1980 award, Raiders of the Lost Ark-1981 award, E. T.-The Extra-Terrestrial-1982, and Return of the Jedi-1983 award) do give a fairly good representation of a cross between financial and critical successes, with a slight edge towards the financial success.

A similar movie poll was administered at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana during March and April of 1984 and dealt
with the films of 1983. The majority of the 29 people who voted were between 18-22 years of age and had 1-4 years of post-high school education.

The voters were shown a booklet featuring newspaper advertisements of the major (and many of the minor) films of 1983 to help them remember which films they saw during the year and which performers were in those films. They voted in 8 categories: Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Song, Best Costumes, and Best Special Effects. The person taking the movie poll had to have seen the film (except in Best Song) involved in order to vote for it in any category, and write-in votes were encouraged.

The voting resulted mostly with films combining financial and critical success predictably winning in most categories. Almost all votes for Best Picture went to the big box-office successes: Terms of Endearment (6 votes), Return of the Jedi (6 votes), The Big Chill (5 votes), and Flashdance (5 votes); the first 3 films were acknowledged critical successes, while the Flashdance votes probably reflect the showy music and dancing rather than the glaring plot incongruities and weak acting. While Best Actor winner Tom Cruise (Risky Business) received both good notices and a healthy box-office following, one can only assume that his 2 runners-up, Robert Duvall (Tender Mercies) and Eric Roberts (Star 80), were very well-liked by the few audience members who saw their films. Best Actress Jennifer Beals, in the highly-profitable and critically-hated Flashdance, edged out 2 critics' favorites: Meryl Streep (Silkwood), Shirley MacLaine
(Terms of Endearment), and Debra Winger (Terms of Endearment). Best Supporting Actor Jack Nicholson (Terms of Endearment) and Best Supporting Actress Carrie Fisher (Return of the Jedi) were both judged favorably by the critics and both won for films that topped the $100,000,000.00 ticket sales mark. The #1 hit song "Flashdance...What a Feeling" (Flashdance) won the Best Song award, in addition to winning a Grammy, an Oscar, and a Golden Globe. The blockbuster Return of the Jedi won in its third and fourth categories for Best Costumes and Best Special Effects, for which it also won a special Academy Award.

With the above data regarding the elements of financially- and critically-successful films of the past and present, it is possible to predict the success--financial and/or critical--of films currently in-the-making. When considering potential financial success, one must remember that the public likes epics and comedies and that they often attend a movie if they think it will be like a film they enjoyed before (hence the popularity of sequels). When considering the potentiality for critical success, one must remember that critics tend to favor human dramas and biographies and appreciate original ideas and techniques.

2 sequels seem destined for both kinds of success. A sure winner (providing it delivers what it promises) is Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984), the sequel to the blockbuster Best Picture nominee Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981), given its epic proportions, popular leading man (Harrison Ford), critically- and financially-popular director (Steven Spielberg), and the fact that it is part of a successful series (similar to the success
of the Star Wars, Superman, and Rocky films). Star Trek III: The Search for Spock (1984) has many of the same elements in its favor: a predecessor (Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan (1982)) that was both a financial and critical hit and epic proportions, in addition to being based on a TV show that has reached cult status.

2 other upcoming sequels will probably not fare as well. Annie II (1984) is the sequel to Annie (1982), which never saw a profit (its large ticket sales could not pay for its gigantic production costs) and received decidedly mixed reviews. Also, Annie II will not have a Tony-winning score and script from which to draw. Another sequel, Oh God Book III (1984), starring George Burns as the diety, will probably fare even worse than Oh God Book II (1980), which bombed, and not at all as well as the original Oh God (1977), which was both a financial and critical success.

2 comedies should prove to be financial—if not critical—hits. Rhinestone (1984) stars Dolly Parton as a woman who proves she can turn "any guy off the street" (Sylvester Stallone) into a country singing star. Parton has yet to appear in a film that has not overcome "so-so" reviews to become a financial success. Stallone still has much of his Rocky box-office "punch" left, and both stars have already begun heavily promoting the film.

The second comedy, Best Defense (1984) stars Dudley Moore and Eddie Murphy as soldiers. Moore often has box-office appeal and usually receives good reviews, and Murphy (like Dolly Parton) has appeared in 2 smash hits that overcome mixed reviews. In addition, service comedies are "in" (e.g. Private Benjamin (1980)
people who saw the quieter *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) enjoyed it, but did not find it necessary to see the film again.

A third reason is that audiences sometimes prefer to see a film if they think it will be like some film they enjoyed before rather than seeing an "unknown entity," or a film with a new style or new ideas. Audiences know that *Cheech and Chong's Nice Dreams* (1981) would contain mostly jokes about drugs and much facial "mugging" at the camera, and they turned it into a financial success. Conversely, the brilliant, dark musical *Pennies From Heaven* (1981) presented a popular performer (Steve Martin) in an unfamiliar role (a down-and-out song salesman), conventional songs ("Pennies From Heaven," "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie," and others) performed in unconventional styles (actors dancing and mouthing the words to songs as sung by the original singers, such as Bing Crosby), and an unfamiliar tone (cynical) for the normally-cheerful musical film style. *Pennies From Heaven* received many enthusiastic reviews as "innovative," but it disappeared from theatres within a matter of weeks.

Still, "all is not lost" for critically-successful films like *Equus* (1977) and *Pennies From Heaven* (1981). Critics' favorites tend to be remembered longer and more fondly than do idiotic moneymakers like *Cheech and Chong's Nice Dreams* (1981). Classic films like *Napoleon* (1929) and *On the Waterfront* (1954) have proven this theory true.