

Movie: Peggy Sue goes back to '60

By Kathy Amen

Peggy Sue Got Married. Directed by Francis Coppola; written by Jerry Leichtling and Arlene Sarner; produced by Paul R. Gurian for Tri-Star. Starring Kathleen Turner and Nicholas Cage. Rated PG-13 (a little implied sex, some double entendres; too harshly rated).

Even if you can't really go home again, it's fun to pretend that you can. Get caught up in the spirit of *Peggy Sue*, and you can take a vicarious trip from "Big Chill" time back to the dawning of adulthood.

It's a bittersweet ride, and a moving, stylish, intelligent and funny movie.

Peggy (Turner) is facing an unhappier future as she confronts a simpler and more pleasant past. It's time for her 25th high school reunion, and her husband, Charlie (Cage), has recently left her for a younger woman. In spite of a supportive daughter and a career, she's an emotional mess. Realistically, someone in her situation probably wouldn't even go

to a reunion. The fact that she does is your first clue that *Peggy Sue* is not a realistic movie.

Overcome when she's named Queen of the reunion, she passes out. And comes to in a very peculiar world -- her world, but 25 years in the past. She looks the same to us, and feels the same to herself, but her friends, including Charlie, see her as the 18-year-old Peggy.

The mechanism for this time travel is never clearly explained (no souped-up DeLoreans here). So while *Peggy Sue* isn't realism, it isn't science fiction either. It's purely a fantasy that makes the most -- comedy-wise -- out of the spectacle of an 80s' woman adrift in the 50s.

But it also packs a surprising emotional punch, and asks some weighty questions: Would we make our crucial life decisions differently, knowing then what we know now? Can learning to appreciate our past make acceptance of the present easier? And, even are humans fated to certain choices and behavior, no matter how we try to avoid them?

In less skillful hands, this heavy undercurrent would easily sink the fragile canoe of fantasy. But between Coppola's remarkable direction and Turner's excellent performance, it stays afloat.

Charlie is something of a problem, though. Cage's youth doesn't bother me (he's 10 years Turner's junior)

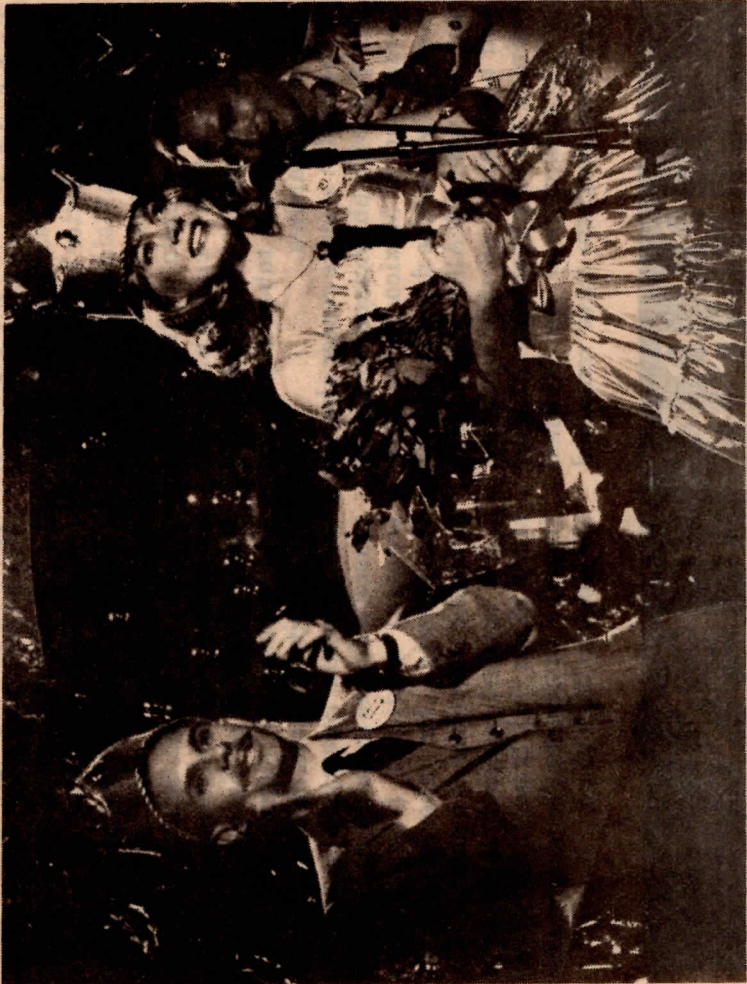
because he's supposed to be 18 most of the time he's on screen. And some of his scenes are simply brilliant. He's a goofy kid, for sure, but an extremely sympathetic one. And the sympathy is achieved largely through little touches rather than grand gestures.

But in other scenes it's hard to tell what effect Cage is after. Perhaps it's his voice, as he affects an annoying lisp. (It's not natural -- I don't remember it in *Birdy* or *Racing with the Moon*.) But whatever it is, in any given scene, Charlie may dazzle, puzzle or disappoint. Be prepared.

The rest of the cast is good, especially J. O'Connor as an early hippie. The expected soundtrack of oldies is well-chosen, but unusual for being unintrusive. Songs play over radios or at dances in a realistic fashion. Period. It's real background music instead of the main reason to see the movie.

The movie's recreation of the world of 1960, seen through Peggy's and our 1986 eyes, is flawlessly detailed. Remember blissfully eating red M&Ms, unaware of the toxins lurking within them?

Peggy Sue does more than just remind us of this more innocent time. When not only Peggy, but, it seems now, the whole world had a brighter and more hopeful future. It lets us return there with her for a little while.



Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) is crowned queen of her 25th high school class reunion as the king, Richard Norvik (Barry Miller) applauds. (Courtesy photo)