

Copyright 2001 VV Publishing Corporation  
Village Voice (New York, NY)  
August 21, 2001, Tuesday  
**SECTION:** Film; Pg. 116

**LENGTH:** 760 words

**HEADLINE:** LOVE AND OTHER CATASTROPHES

**BYLINE:** Jessica Winter

**BODY:**

Captain Corelli's Mandolin

Directed by John Madden

Written by Shawn Slovo, from the novel by Louis de Bernieres

Universal Opens August 17

**Brooklyn Babylon**

Directed by Marc **Levin**

Written by **Levin**, Bonz Malone, and Pam Widener

Artisan BAMcinematek August 17 through 23

Hamlet

Adapted and directed by Campbell Scott and Eric Simonson, from  
the play by William Shakespeare

Hallmark Screening Room August 17 through 23

Maybe all anyone needs to know about Captain Corelli's Mandolin  
can be parsed from its title. The Captain as in "& Tennille," since the  
Italian officer played by Nicolas Cage fancies himself less a soldier  
than a song man, arriving on the Greek island of Cephallonia during  
World War II with his harmonizing band of ragtag fellow conscripts

like they'd booked a cabaret run at their own personal Club Med. Corelli as in (to quote the man himself), "Well, we're Italian--famous for singing, eating, and making love," a burst of ethnic pride that Cage delivers in an iambic singsong learned from watching himself in *Moonstruck*. And finally, the vaunted Mandolin, that mellifluous aphrodisiac, that siren call which stops local beauty Pelagia (Penelope Cruz) in her tracks each time the Captain's poetic fingers come near his instrument. Pelagia hates the smug, bleating troops ("A brave Italian is a freak of nature!"), and she's betrothed to illiterate, ruddy oaf Mandras (Christian Bale), who's away fighting. But the girl can't help it: Corelli is strumming her pain with his fingers, singing her life with his every carefully rolled r.

Madden's previous film, *Shakespeare in Love*, at least had a sense of pacing and a discernible shape; Captain Corelli's Mandolin billows in any direction that Shawn Slovo's gasbag script might blow it. The broken-crutch voice-over meanders between the oldster aphorisms of Pelagia's physician dad (John Hurt) and the girl's own saddened musings. The locals are unfailingly, anachronistically plucky. (The mayor's official response to the Italians' request for surrender: "Fack off!") The big message seems to be that tolerance is good, but since the film doesn't differentiate between politics and jingoism, it needs to demonstrate that We're All the Same Inside, right down to how everybody on the island speaks English with a similar intermittent Mediterranean accent. (The exception is the nasty Teuton hanging around; as Mandras gravely intones, "One thing is sure--you can't trust the Germans.") The Greeks, as it turns out, like to sing, eat, and make love too--even with Italians. Pelagia and Corelli enjoy sex alfresco, and passion conquers war. Ms. Cruz, apparently optimistic about her corner of Hollywood's gilded cage, once again proves her inability to give a bad performance even under the worst of circumstances--her perfectly modulated emotional range and undaunted conviction while spouting pap is heartening and cumulatively poignant.

aa Another star-cross'd intertribal romance, Marc Levin's *Brooklyn Babylon*, set during a hot summer in Crown Heights, is an ethnic-strife tract as thuddingly didactic as his previous *Whiteboys*. Early scenes attempt urban anthropology by cutting between a nightclub mostly frequented by African Americans and an Orthodox wedding

reception, until worlds literally collide in a car wreck and two enemy passengers lock gazes:hip-hop artist Sol (Tariq Trotter) and Jewish maiden Sara (Karen Goberman). She's all but engaged to slurring, heavy-lidded thug Judah (David Vadim), who at one point is told by a black character, "You know the rules. You stay on your fucking side, we stay on our side." Levin, who fashions the movie as a religious fable (Solomon and the Queen of Sheba falling for each other), picks sides early on: The African Americans are witty and poetic, the Jews repressed and insular--except for Sara, whose eyes open to the world around the time she murmurs to Sol, "You seem different from what you look like....You don't seem scary." Nope, but Brooklyn Babylon's billboard-size sloganeering is frightful enough on its own.

aa Campbell Scott and Eric Simonson's "Jazz Age" Hamlet distinguishes itself as perhaps the most improbably low-key imagining of rotten Denmark ever committed to film. Claudius (Jamey Sheridan) is faintly amused; Horatio (John Benjamin Hickey) is faintly perturbed; Hamlet himself (Scott) is faintly put-out. The hermetic interiors give off a musty Masterpiece Theatre odor; an aura of dust and mothballs evidently leaves a capable cast feeling woozy.

**GRAPHIC:** Stranded: hurt and cruz in Captain Corelli's Mandolin

PETER MOUNTAIN

**LOAD-DATE:** August 17, 2001