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MOVIES

Lesley Ann Warren bringing 1985 cult comedy film to Detroit on tour

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Key Points

- Actress Lesley Ann Warren is touring for the 40th anniversary of the 1985 film "Clue: The Movie."
- Warren, who played Miss Scarlet, will participate in a Q&A at a screening in Detroit.
- The film was a box office failure upon release but later became a cult classic through television and home video.

Was it Miss Scarlet, in the theater, with the microphone?

Not yet, but it will come to pass on Nov. 15, at Detroit's Fisher Theatre, when actress Lesley Ann Warren joins audience members for a live screening of the classic 1985 mystery-farce “Clue: The Movie.”

The 79-year-old actress who famously portrayed Miss Scarlet in the film based on the timeless Hasbro board game will stop in Detroit as part of a multi-city theater tour celebrating the movie’s 40th anniversary, and will participate in an onstage Q&A before the 7:30 p.m. screening. (The tour stopped in November 2025 at the Royal Oak Music Theatre.)

“I love people’s enthusiasm for ‘Clue,’” Warren told the Free Press last year, ahead of a screening at Royal Oak Music Theatre. “It makes me happy.

“That’s exactly why I decided to do (the anniversary tour) — because it’s so beloved and adored by people of all ages. I mean, I get fan mail from 9-year-olds, and I get fan mail from grandmothers. It’s crazy! It has such an appeal to such a wide swath of people, and so their joy in it excited me to be able to be a spokesperson for the movie because some of the great people in our movie are gone.”

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How she landed the role

Warren’s participation in the movie almost didn’t happen and was not intended from the outset. The late “Star Wars” actress Carrie Fisher was originally cast in the Miss Scarlet role, but addiction problems sent the actress to rehab.

“Carrie was a friend,” said Warren, “and I knew what Carrie was going through personally. I was in Greece, and when they called and let me know that she was not going to be doing the movie for personal reasons, they simply asked me if I would like to do Miss Scarlet. It all worked out serendipitously, very beautifully.

“We spent about 3½ months on the Paramount lot,” she said of the shooting process. “They built the entire set on the soundstage. They actually had to knock through the ceiling because they wanted the two stories. They wanted us to run up the stairs and do all of that and have it be very real, very practical, and so it was an absolute joy.”

Those stairs, however, came with a unique problem that was handily solved by the film’s costumer.

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“Michael Kaplan did costume design,” Warren said. “He’s brilliant. And what I loved about him and his work is that he had such attention to detail. I wanted Miss Scarlet to have this hourglass figure, and so he designed and created the undergarment, which was a corset of the day, the sort of ambiguous 1950s look.

Everything he did was meticulous. Then, when we started shooting, we all realized that I couldn't get up the stairs because the dress was so tight, so he designed a second dress really fast with a hidden zipper that I could surreptitiously unzip in the scenes when I had to run upstairs with everybody else.

"He was like that with every character. He designed that dress to make it look like it was always falling off — which it never did, but (Miss Scarlet) uses men and manipulates men, so it had to have all of that within. It was absolutely divine to work with him. Wonderful."

A cultural phenomenon

"Clue" has generations of fans around the world, but many people age 40 and younger may not realize that, circa 1985, the movie's cast was a knockout, all-star lineup of beloved, award-winning talents. Along with recent Oscar nominee Warren (for her work in 1982's "Victor / Victoria"), Eileen Brennan (Mrs. Peacock) was also a recent supporting actress Oscar nominee for the 1980 Goldie Hawn comedy hit "Private Benjamin." Madeline Kahn (Mrs. White) had two Tony nods under her belt and was nominated for Oscars two years in a row for her supporting work in "Paper Moon" and "Blazing Saddles."

Meanwhile, Michael McKean (Mr. Green) was fresh off the pioneering 1984 cult mockumentary "This Is Spinal Tap." Christopher Lloyd (Professor Plum) had recently ended a wildly successful, Emmy-winning run as Reverend Jim Ignatowski on the hit sitcom "Taxi"; in the same year "Clue" was released, he debuted as Doc Brown in the box office megahit "Back to the Future." Martin Mull (Colonel Mustard) was a household favorite for his work in TV comedies "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," "Fernwood 2 Night" and "America 2 Night." And Tim Curry (Wadsworth) was a bona fide stage and screen star, with work such as "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" and his Tony-nominated turn in "Amadeus" in the rearview mirror.

“I’ve said this before,” said Warren, “but I believe it truly in my heart that these were some of the most brilliant comic actors ever,” she said. “And they were comic *actors* — they weren’t comics or comedians. They were real actors who happened to have an incredible acute funny bone. We had so much fun watching each other’s work. And we actually drove Jonathan Lynn a little crazy as the director. We would be cracking up all the time, and it was a little bit like herding cats. It was pretty rough on him, but we had such a deep appreciation for each other’s work that we just couldn’t hold it in.”

When asked where the legendary chemistry among the ensemble came from, Warren said, “Who knows?”

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“Those kinds of revelations when you’re working come out of nowhere,” she said. “They don’t always happen. Most of the time, they don’t, even if you get along. But this was so amazingly easy and enmeshed in a great, healthy way. We supported each other, but we were also very individuated and able to create these very iconic characters in our own way, but with great appreciation for each other. We got very friendly, and we stayed friends. Colleen Camp (Yvette) and Martin Mull and I went on to do another four or five other projects together, and I adored him. Absolutely adored him. It was one of those rare instances where everything worked.

“I loved being partnered with Martin because he just made me laugh all the time, which was so great. And there’s a scene, actually, where we’re behind the bar and both trying to go out at the same time. If you look really carefully, you can see that I’m trying so hard not to laugh. I’m still struck with how brilliantly funny this movie is. It really does hold up, and I think everyone is at the top of their game.”

Mull died last year at age 80.

Multiple endings

Despite the tremendous comedic muscle of its starry cast, director Jonathan Lynn's brilliant script, and so many other elements that worked, the movie received mixed-to-negative reviews at the time of its release and turned out to be a box office failure. Part of the blame was placed on Paramount's odd marketing strategy regarding the film's infamous three different endings: In an effort to drive marketing curiosity, the studio sent different endings to different theaters, with showings labeled A, B and C. Execs believed it would encourage people to see the movie multiple times at different locations, but instead, people stayed home altogether.

The movie took on a new life in the early 1990s, when, as a cheap rental, it became a regular fixture on local and network television stations around the U.S., showing frequently at odd hours of the day and night —and showing (as on the home video release) all three endings together, one after the other. Schoolchildren, insomniacs and everyone in between began stumbling onto this little gem and telling their friends about it.

"We were surprised that it didn't do really fabulously," Warren said. "We were disappointed because we'd had such a fantastic time, and we found it so funny. And then, I got a call from Martin one day, and he said, 'Are you getting a ton of fan mail for 'Clue?' That's how we found out that it had reached this kind of zeitgeist with people. I mean, people would come up to me on the street — and still do — and recite their favorite lines from the movie. You can never foresee anything like that happening, but when it does, it's an incredible gift for all of those involved."

Warren, who has been privileged to work with a number of acclaimed directors throughout her career, reflected on some of her experiences.

"The thing about really great directors," she said, "is that they're all very unique and very different in their approach. Jonathan was fast-paced, and he did a really interesting thing where he brought all of us together before we knew each other, at

Paramount, and had a screening of ‘His Girl Friday’ with Cary Grant. He wanted us to, as a group, understand the pace and the clipped, staccato kind of way they talked, and that’s what he wanted in the movie. So we had a communal experience, which was great because it set us on the right path together.”

She contrasted this with the directing style of Blake Edwards on “Victor/Victoria.”

“We never talked about it beforehand,” she said, “but what we would do is we would get called to the set, and we would rehearse it without him, and then he would come to the set and see what we had done, and usually very gently and without making anybody feel wrong or ashamed, he would change everything, which would make it much funnier. Also, he liked to improvise a lot. Nothing in ‘Clue’ was improvised, but I did a ton of improvisation in ‘Victor/Victoria.’

“And then, Mel Brooks is a whole other kind of director. Steven Soderbergh is a whole other kind of director. They’re all different, and that’s what makes it exciting. That’s what I love about acting.”

Still active in the industry, Warren starred in “Home Delivery” last year and put in a guest appearance on "9-1-1."

She also received rave reviews for her work in a short film making its way around the festival circuit. “Olive,” a 13-minute drama about the difficulties of memory loss, features the actress in a feisty, heartbreaking lead performance as directed by 26-year-old French costar Tom Koch.

“I’m so utterly proud of it,” she said, “and it’s getting spectacular reviews. It’s unlike anything I’ve gotten in many, many years. It’s just staggering. Working with (Koch) was a dream in a whole other way."

The actress is excited for her trip to Detroit, where she’ll interact directly with ticketholders.

“I will be doing a full-on interview onstage with my interviewer, who will ask questions,” she said, “and then I’ll be taking questions from the audience. So if they have any specific questions, they should come on! And then, they show the movie after all of that. It really does cover the making and all of the particulars of the interactions of these characters, these actors.”

'Clue: The Movie' 40th anniversary screening

7 p.m, Nov. 15

Fisher Theatre

3011 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit

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$62.83 & up