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CINEMA

Sherman's March

Review by Lois Wadsworth

Ross McElwee originally subtitled this hilarious autobiographical work *A Meditation Upon the Possibilities of Romantic Love in the South During an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation but settled for the shorter An Improbable Quest for Love. He started out to follow General William Tecumseh Sherman's destructive march through the south during the Civil War, but he ended up marching through the New South looking for love.*

When his girlfriend abandons him for another man just as he's about to start shooting a funded documentary on *Sherman's March*, director-actor-writer and teacher of filmmaking Ross McElwee tells us right away that he's "searching for romantic love, where people stay with each other for a long time—like more than two weeks."

McElwee's wry humor touches every scene in the picture, but it is particularly evident in the times when he faces the camera alone and confesses his loneliness or ineptitude with women or when he falls down the hill with great comic timing at a Civil War monument.

When his girlfriend leaves him, McElwee goes back to his hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina, to lick his wounds and figure out what kind of movie to make. Out rowing with his sister,

who's a bit of a nut for cosmetic surgery, he films her giving him good advice on how to use his camera to pick up women. "Everyone here thinks this is *PM Magazine*," she explains, just as a beautiful woman swims by and waves.

He meets the swimmer, a daffy, aspiring-actress named Pat who wants him to film her doing cellulite exercises, during which she confesses that she doesn't wear undies. Pat leaves town to pursue her acting career and to catch up with her idol, Burt Reynolds. Reynolds becomes McElwee's minor obsession, eventually filmed glad-handing a crowd and kissing babies at a publicity appearance, but Pat doesn't come back.

Next, he gets connected with Claudia, a right-wing interior decorator, who takes McElwee to a remote survivalist camp where they're building lead-lined bunkers and a tennis court.

He goes to visit an old friend and former teacher, Charleen, who thinks he should put down his camera and get busy making

babies. She introduces him to Deedee, whose house is stockpiled with food and water to survive two weeks after a nuclear holocaust, and who really wants a Mormon priest for a husband. Charleen gives him a bad time for deciding Deedee's not right for him:

"You've got to kid yourself, kid her, and then you both believe it."

And there's Wini, a linguist who lives on an island, who lets McElwee stay with her for a while, but when he leaves for a couple months, she takes up with another man. An ex-girlfriend he visits who's an anti-nuclear activist isn't interested in him now.

Another old girlfriend, a beautiful lawyer, ditches him right away for the same man she always ditches him for. And a singer he meets leaves town for the big time.

The enduring portrait of McElwee that comes through in *Sherman's March* is that of a self-effacing man whose laconic sense of time, place, and these wacky people is loving and gentle. Not to be missed, the picture opens at Cinema 7 Friday, Jan. 9.



Filmmaker Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* is an hilarious, autobiographical "search for romantic love."

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