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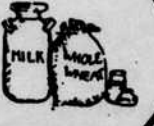
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ICINEMA

Dona Herlinda

Review by Lois Wadsworth

Mexican writer-director Jaime Her-
 mosillo's latest film is an uncon-
 ventional family love story in which the
 congenial manipulations of Dona
 Herlinda make sure that her son can
 be with his true love—another man—
 and respectfully married to a woman.

Rodolfo is a busy doctor; his
 younger lover, Ramon, is a music
 student. Rodolfo and Ramon are
 frustrated by numerous interrup-
 tions whenever they steal a little
 time together. So when Dona
 Herlinda invites Ramon to move in
 with them, telling him that
 Rodolfo has a large room and a
 big bed, Ramon is surprised but
 happy. Dona Herlinda generously
 and genuinely includes Ramon in
 all traditional family activities.

Even though she knows that her
 son is gay, Dona Herlinda can't
 help dreaming of a wealthy bride
 for him, partly because she knows
 it's important to keep up appear-
 ances in middle-class Guadalajara.
 But Mama is really always secretly
 conspiring for her son's happiness,
 which she sees to be grounded in
 his love for Ramon.

Dona Herlinda selects Olga for
 Rodolfo to court and wed; he com-
 plies, as he tells a tearful Ramon,
 because mama wants him to.
 Things work out really well for
 everyone when Olga turns out to

be a feminist herself. Eventually,
 Rodolfo, Ramon, Olga, and the
 new baby all live together in Dona
 Herlinda's house as a loving ex-
 tended family.

With a different director this
 quirky idea would never work as a
 film, but Jaime Hermosillo has
 made an enjoyable film that is
 both frankly sexual and amiably
 tolerant of sexual differences.
 Despite her manipulations, Dona
 Herlinda's gentle good nature
 predominates, and Rodolfo, Ramo,
 and Olga relate to one another
 with consideration and concern as
 a loving family. Hermosillo has a
 gift for getting natural perform-
 ances from his actors (none of
 whom were professionals) while
 not diluting his sexual message at
 all.

Explicit sexual behavior between
 men, including nude scenes, might
 make the film difficult for some
 viewers. From a culture noted for
 its he-man attitudes towards sex,
Dona Herlinda and Her Son is
 less about sexual behavior than it
 is about the tenderness men are
 capable of with each other.

What is truly amazing about this
 little film from Mexico is the
 wonderful good humor of the
 story. The family unit is a central

aspect of Mexican national
 character, and Dona Herlinda,
 played by Guadalupe Del Toro,
 sees it as the basis for all happi-
 ness. She tries unsuccessfully to
 get Ramon to attend the party an-
 nouncing Rodolfo and Olga's en-
 gagement. At the gathering, Dona
 Herlinda joyously confides that her
 son is "ambidextrous," a word
 with a secret meaning. The au-
 dience loves being in on the joke.

The picture was shot on a very
 small budget in Guadalajara, and
 the actors were mostly locals. The
 mother of a film student known to
 Hermosillo turned into the won-
 derful Dona Herlinda. Guadalupe
 Del Toro's only previous acting ex-
 perience was in one of her son's
 student films. She is unusually
 self-possessed and confident for a
 first-time actress. Marco Antonio
 Trevino plays the handsome, com-
 pliant Rodolfo quite competently,
 but he only took the role of the
 gay man after consulting with his
 family and his girlfriend. Like
 Trevino, Arturo Meza (Ramon)
 and Leticia Lupersio (Olga) had
 some experience acting on the
 stage. This cast gives the un-
 mistakable impression that they
 like one another, and we know that
 we like them.

Mosquito Coast

Review by Richard Wilen

Allie Fox is fed up, and he is
 just not gonna take it anymore, by
 golly. America is in the toilet, and
 Allie Fox, in his humble opinion,
 is the last real man left in this
 country. And doing something
 about it takes not your regular
 kind of gumption, but "four-
 o'clock-in-the-morning courage."

His solution: abandon our flaw-
 ed ship of state and head for the
 hills, in this case the Mosquito
 Coast of Central America. Taking
 a knack for inventiveness, a few
 meager belongings, and his startled
 family, this New England Yankee
 careens off on an adventure that
 would leave the Swiss Family
 Robinson gasping in their tracks.

The Mosquito Coast, starring
 Harrison Ford as Allie Fox, and
 directed by Peter Weir, is a
 generally faithful adaptation of the
 zany novel by Paul Theroux. With
 a fast-paced script and a good
 cast, Weir once again demonstrates
 his cinematic magic. Filmed on
 location in Belize, the photography
 is nicely done, frequently utilizing
 the broad visual strokes that Weir

does so well.

The story is told by Allie's
 adolescent son Charlie (River
 Phoenix) and the voice-over nar-
 ration provides a nice touch. Com-
 ing off recent critical success in
Stand By Me, Phoenix provides a
 strong performance as Allie's
 oldest child and right-hand man.
 Charlie is devoted to his father,
 but is in constant turmoil as he
 watches the elder Fox crash into
 the hard world of reality time and
 time again.

But don't be taking the notion
 that Mr. Fox is any man's fool. He
 is the paragon of Yankee ingenuity,
 with sure-fire solutions to all their
 problems. You see, Allie has
 invented a way to turn heat into
 ice; and as any fool knows: "Ice is
 civilization!" Armed with his
 miraculous invention, Allie plans
 to revolutionize life in his new-
 found Garden of Eden.

But somehow things just never
 quite work out for Allie. The
 family's misfortunes get ever more
 perverse, and you often don't know
 whether to laugh or cry.

In a recent magazine interview,
 Weir said that he sees Allie as a
 flawed hero who does not grow
 better, but instead gets worse.
 This, according to Weir, counters a
 recent tendency to always bolster
 our heroes, despite their faults.
 Theroux's tragic "rugged indivi-
 dualist" provides the perfect vehi-
 cle for the director's ambitions.
 Allie is engaging, well intentioned,
 and capable. But driven by fate
 and his own mania, he cannot tru-
 ly reach the pinnacle he desires.
 Life for him is instead a long skid
 into a downward spiral.

Ford does a creditable job of
 developing the role on the screen,
 but his performance is a bit
 wooden at times. He does not
 fully bring out the great emotional
 depth which the character has in
 the novel, taking a slight edge off
 the film's impact.

But this film works well on
 many levels and most of the time
 takes you for a good ride. It offers
 an intriguing mix of humor and
 tragedy that provides an offbeat,
 but poignant, tale.

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