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CINEMA

Light of Day

Review by Lois Wadsworth

Writer-director Paul Schrader's lifeless family drama stars Joan Jett and Michael J. Fox as a sister and brother rock 'n roll team, and Gena Rowlands as their long-suffering mother.

Patti and Joe are a couple of working class musicians trying to move up in Cleveland's grungy bar scene with their band, the Barbusters. But the story of *Light of Day* isn't about rock and roll, it's about family.

For years, Joe has tried to patch things up between Patti and their mother, but Patti's uncompromising hostility and mom's pretentious preachings make it pretty hard. Patti loves her little boy (who has no father), but her obvious ambivalence about motherhood gets in the way. Joe loves the kid, who calls him "Daddy" in a scene where they take a bath together.

Joe has a day job at a plant that makes metal trays, and he works weekends with Patti and the band. He puts up with a lot from his neurotic sister, too much. Eventually we understand. In the film's best scene, Joe and Patti are in a club at closing time, a little drunk, slow dancing and talking intimately. He tells her that he's always compared other women to her, but no one's ever come close. "Why don't we talk about this stuff more?" he asks. Why, indeed?

Paul Schrader shows a real knack for setting up dramatic themes and then abandoning them in *Light of Day*. There are poten-

tially juicy areas to investigate in the bleak, stifling mother/daughter relationship, and unexplored conflicts at work in the darker sources of Joe's obsession with his self-centered sister. But screenwriter-director Schrader creates emotionally pale creatures who don't have enough vitality or authenticity to engage our interest. He sidesteps the involving issues he raises in favor of an episodic, soap opera approach that left me, for one, feeling rather depressed. The final sequence is not only trite but insulting in its simplistic attempt at resolution.

Joan Jett is terribly miscast as Patti—her hard face and unaging nature are too wooden to create a feeling center around which a movie might have been made. Jett's emotionless performance drains energy from the viewer.

Michael J. Fox as Joe is such a good boy he's boring. I mean he stands up for the kid, takes care of his mom, sacrifices to pay off his sister's debts, works hard, and doesn't complain. He's just an unselfish guy who really started annoying me before the movie was over. Wise up, I wanted to say, think of yourself for a change, be human.

Gena Rowlands as Mother takes an equally unsatisfying character and gives it her best shot, but with somewhat the same effect. So what? and who cares? are some unkindnesses that come to mind.

In short, *Light of Day* is a long, dark tunnel from which nobody gets reborn.

now showing

An American Tail: Animated. A young mouse travels to America in the late 1800's, and washes ashore in New York harbor. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Black Widow: A woman feigns friendship, with a suspected husband-killer in an effort to learn the truth. Stars Debra Winger and Theresa Russell (*Insignificance*). McDonald (344-4343).

Children of a Lesser God: William Hurt (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*) stars as a teacher of the deaf in this adaptation of the award-winning play. Shows with Saturday-only sneak preview *Some Kind of Wonderful*. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Crimes of the Heart: Dramatic comedy. Three sisters reunite and consider their various notorious lives. Stars Oscar winners Diane Keaton, Sissy Spacek, and Jessica Lange. Based on the Pulitzer caliber play. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Crocodile Dundee: A celebrated Aussie adventurer, naive to city ways, spends some time in the Big Apple. Oakway (342-5351).

From the Hip: Comedy. A young lawyer's unruly, but winning, tactics are challenged by a tough case and disapproving superiors. Stars Judd Nelson (*St. Elmo's Fire*). West 11th (342-4142) and with *Light of Day*, Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Hannah and Her Sisters: Romantic comedy. Relationships, desires, and problems of well-off Manhattanites, as presented by Woody Allen. Cinema World (342-6536).

Light of Day: This drama of family conflict includes a film debut by Joan Jett. Michael J. Fox plays her brother in a bar scene band. Gena Rowlands is the troubling mama. Shows with *From the Hip* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Little Shop of Horrors: Rick Moranis (*Ghostbusters*) takes on Steve Martin in this wacky musical romance about a bloodthirsty flower. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Mannequin: Can a handsome young actor find true romance with a department store dummy? Andrew McCarthy finds out. West 11th (342-4142).

Outrageous Fortune: A pair of women search for their two-timing lover, who has mysteriously disappeared. Bette Midler and Shelley Long star in this cross-country comedy. Cinema World (342-6536).

Over the Top: Sylvester Stallone's latest big-muscle showcase. Here he plays an entrant in a wrist wrestling contest who is trying to get his son back. Cinema World (342-6536).

The Platoon: A day-by-day G.I. perspective of the Vietnam war. Directed by Oliver Stone (*Salvador*), who received a Purple Heart in 1967. National (344-3431).

Radio Days: This remembrance of scenes past reveals the effect of early radio shows upon a child's unglamorous family. Directed and narrated by an off-camera Woody Allen. Cinema World (342-6536).

Return to Horror Height: Opens this week at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

A Room with a View: A young Englishwoman, during her proper Victorian finishing, has to choose between her dignified fiancé and an unorthodox artist. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Some Kind of Wonderful: Sneak preview this Saturday with *Children of a Lesser God*. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Star Trek IV: More adventure for Kirk and crew. This episode brings them back to our present to help us do what we alone cannot—survive! West 11th (342-4142).

Summer: A young Frenchwoman's search for company on her summer vacation is the basis for this romantic comedy. Bijou (686-2458).

Top Gun: Tom Cruise trains to be a hot-shot fighter pilot when he's not relaxing with Kelly McGinnis. Fine Arts (747-2201) and Bijou (686-2458).

True Stories: Odd and eccentric personalities in a fictional Texas town are the focus of the tales herein. A film by the Talking Heads' David Byrne. Bijou (686-2458).

What Happened to Kerouac?: Documentary about the late "beat" novelist/poet, including readings by the author, interviews with Allen Ginsberg and Neal Cassady, television footage, and jazz by Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

—True Michael Sussman

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