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At the movies

'Crimes of the Heart' falls short but contains its brilliant moments

Take "Hannah and Her Sisters," throw in a dash of "Julia" and "Little Women," stir in "Terms of Endearment" and "Gone With the Wind" and what have you got?

"Crimes of the Heart," an affectionate, leisurely movie that embraces southern life, sibling rivalries and dark secrets past and present as they are seen through the eyes of three sisters.

Lenny McGrath (Diane Keaton) is a self-effacing spinster who shrinks from sex with the same vehemence that she shrinks from fun. Her idea of a high time is to work in the garden "wearing the lime-green gloves of a dead

Review by Mary Courtis

woman," or to sing happy birthday to herself over a succession of heart-shaped cookies with candles stuck in their centers.

In contrast, Meg (Jessica Lange) is an ambitious rebel, who left family and her home-town boyfriend Doc (Sam Sheppard) for a shot at success and stardom in California. Neither materialized. But Meg would rather lie and keep her distance from her old friends than see her glamorous image shattered.

The lives of these two sisters are drawn together again by the plight of Babe (Sissy Spacek) the youngest McGrath, who has been arrested and accused of shooting her husband.

Lenny and Meg rally around her. But to their dismay, Babe is not very cooperative. She hides from her lawyer, expects her sisters to make excuses for her, and refuses to tell even them the reasons why she shot her spouse because she is "sorta protecting somebody."

This somebody is Willie J., a fifteen-year-old black Adonis with thighs that put Arnold

Schwarzeneger to shame. Southern taboos against cradle snatching and black-white intimacy being what they are, Babe does not want their affair made public, and fortunately her husband feels the same. Thus, they are able to reach a settlement out of court.

But this seedy side-plot only serves as a backdrop for the central focus of the film: the squabbles, confidences and heartaches shared between three very different women who are desperately trying to love and understand one another.

These exchanges are poignant, often hilarious and always entertaining. But somehow they fall short of our expectations. As do the performances of Keaton, Lange and Spacek. All of them appear too conscious of the fact that they are in the company of two other Oscar winning actresses and consequently their portrayals seem stilted and forced on occasion.

None of them are able to really let loose and live the essence of the characters they embody, though Spacek comes the closest. She brings a sunny irresponsibility and immature vulnerability to the role of Babe that is apt, engaging and light. A nice touch that will probably win her an Academy Award nomination.

However, the actress who shines brightest in the film is Tess Harper, who plays Chick, the McGrath group's nosey, sharp tongued cousin and neighbor. Her snide remarks and cheap "southern belle" swagger are delivered with energy, freshness and conviction and when she snaps out lines like "I'll jerk you both around until you're bald!" at her two bratty kids, "Crimes of the Heart" is at its peak. Too bad her talents are not exploited more extensively. If they had been, the movie might have been a memorable event instead of a near miss.

"Crimes of the Heart" plays nightly at Valley River Cinema.

'Mosquito Coast' disappoints

"Look around, Charlie. This is a toilet."

Allie Fox (Harrison Ford), genius inventor and terminal non-conformist, has little good to say about America. After

Review by Sean Axmaker

unveiling his latest invention, a self contained refrigeration unit he names Fat Boy, to his unimpressed employer he decides to take his family and his inven-

tion to the Mosquito Coast in Central America in the Caribbean.

Allie's stated goal is quite simple—he wants to bring civilization to the river villages in the Central American jungle. That can be accomplished quite easily for, as Allie insists, "ice is civilization" and Allie has the greatest ice maker in the world.

Someone else who wants to bring civilization to Central America is the Rev. Gurney Spellgood (Andre Gregory).

When Allie and Gurney meet on the voyage south Allie doesn't hide his intense dislike of the Reverend and his teachings (Allie doesn't hide his dislike of much of anything). Gurney takes the barbed gibes good-naturedly for he sees Allie as someone who needs saving.

Allie does need saving, but not in the way the Reverend thinks. Allie's perceptive son Charlie (River Phoenix) begins to realize this as time passes in their new jungle home. The story is told from his point of view and thus we learn what lies under the surface of Charlie's father as Charlie does. Outside of civilized society, outside of the restrictions imposed by living in America, Allie creates his own world where he slowly but certainly becomes a dictator.

Though directed by Peter

Turn to Page 7



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