

Growing up a star takes its toll on River Phoenix

By DAN SACHER

The Daily Pennsylvanian, U. of Pennsylvania

River Phoenix is 21 years old and press-weary.

"I've been doing this press thing for the last three months," Phoenix said. "It's ridiculous. And the funny thing is you'll never know actors. You're never going to know me or (co-star) Keanu (Reeves) or let's say, De Niro. It's all hearsay."

Despite River Phoenix's caveat, an almost deafening clamor follows his latest starring role in the film "My Own Private Idaho." Director Gus Van Sant's follow-up to "Drugstore Cowboy."

And it's not just the shuffling feet of standard fare paparazzi.

It's one of those infrequent situations when mass appeal stars step out of their pop culture stratosphere to delve into high art.

They validate the audience's ultimate hope that they're not stars just because they are dashing, young and handsome, but because they are highly sensitive and, yes, even talented.

In the last 3 months, no fewer than four feature articles about the film have appeared in publications like the New York Times Magazine, Premiere, People and Film Comment.

And "Idaho" garnered major awards at both the Venice and Toronto film festivals recently.

All of the attention is not without reason. The merits of "My Own Private Idaho" are unquestionably high.

Arguably, it exists beyond criticism. Being so real and so bold, the film seems unaware of any responsibility to please, only to intrigue.

The film concentrates on the lives of Mark (Phoenix) and Scott (Reeves), two male prostitutes on the rough streets of Portland. Van Sant does not approach the film with that simple of a slant. He composes the film on a variety of levels, gliding effortlessly from harsh street reality to the vaguely surreal.

Some scenes ring true as documentary, others speak with poetry lifted directly from Shakespeare's verse.

Van Sant elaborates, "I was playing with styles all the way throughout the film. When I was writing the screenplay, I envisioned these different modes."

Alluding to the collaborative spirit of the film, Phoenix said, "We defined every scene — documentary, neorealism, Shakespearean — stylistically doing a step ladder into and out of each mode. It's such a hard thing to pull off."

The Shakespearean element of the film rests in Scott, the ne'er-do-well son of the Portland mayor.

His mentor, Bob (William Richert) is a character pulled directly from Van Sant's shady, curiosity-induced experiences on "the street."

"Scott's a pseudo-character playing out his time. He's not of the street. He's not for the street. He just wants to taste the street," Phoenix said.

"It's the real shit. No corny dialogue. It's not using reverse psychology catch phrases like, 'I love you,' 'slap,' 'I want to screw you.' 'I mean c'mon, get out of the way,' he added.

Aware, and wary, of the tired conventions of Hollywood, he reflects on his own recent career choices. He sees a need to play an active role in his casting.

"That's one thing I've really worked on, because you've got to take responsibility to cast yourself. 'Cause they'll throw the part on you. I mean for example's sake, Dillon — God bless his heart — did 'A Kiss Before Dying.' For me, I mean I just can't be that cool. I don't have it in me, so I didn't do it."

With the exception of "A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon," Phoenix has obviously been vigilant in the parts he has taken. River came to Idaho just off the set of "Dogfight," a low-budget picture by Nancy Savoca.

"There was nothing really strategic about doing those films. I wasn't trying to say anything or prove anything. There are just so few good scripts out there that when you find one you jump on it."



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW LINE CINEMAS

Clockwise Orange: Keanu Reeves and River Phoenix are red hot in New Line's 'Idaho.'

There is a mix of cynicism and weariness in his voice. Granted, it's early in the day, but two days previous at a 5 o'clock press conference, he seemed equally drained.

It's evident that he cares about both movies coming out this month and he's sincere in his desire to give each question more than just the perfunctory answer. It's also clear that he's a bit frustrated.

"I really don't like movies all that much. There's more to life than movies. Especially since most things are bullshit."

The first nine years of his life were spent in or around Caracas, and his parents did missionary work in South America. He attended Montessori school down there and had an easy time. "I would count one hundred beads, and they'd put me in the first grade. I was great," he said.

After spending a year in Florida, his parents packed up the whole show and moved to Hollywood.

"Talk about culture shock. I mean, I got it," he said. "I knew what was going on. Everyone was just fucking angry, fucking pissed off. Hard-up, abused by their family,

the world, the streets. All these rich kids, children of celebrities, and they're fucking perverts. They're out of their minds."

It's this keen sense of people and what makes them tick that makes Phoenix an effective actor.

The ease with which he finds identity in the most foreign of roles is rooted in that interest.

At the end of the press conference his work is done.

He has fielded a plethora of questions and looks anxious to move on.

Van Sant and Phoenix leave the stage after the critics' screening of Idaho. A reporter's hand raises and fingers snap in the crowd.

"Over here Gus, River," someone yells. A flash clicks, burns.

"Loved it, it was great."

Smile, click.

"Preciate it, thanks."

"Preciate it."

Another voice, "Over here."

Click.

Click, snap.

'Father of the Bride' divorces itself from original

By JOANNE CHOI

Daily Bruin, UCLA

"Don't forget to fasten your condom" may sound like a slogan for safe sex, but it's not. It's Steve Martin's bit of advice to his daughter in Touchstone Pictures' remake of "Father of the Bride."

In this hilarious updated version of the 1950 Spencer Tracy-Elizabeth Taylor film, Martin plays the eccentric but loving father of Annie Banks (Kimberley Williams) who must deal with the anguish of his daughter leaving the fold.

The writer/director/producer husband and wife team of Charles Shyer and Nancy Meyers ("Private Benjamin" and "Baby Boom") have breathed new life, as well as a rediscovery of family values, into the 1950 classic.

Diane Keaton plays Martin's wife, Nina. She is a successful mother, wife and career woman. Unlike the original film, which lacked a strong maternal figure, Nina's

Three of a kind

She's where every aspiring college actress wants to be. Signed to a three-picture deal with Touchstone Pictures, Northwestern U. junior Kimberley Williams already has worked with some of Hollywood's best.

Working with comedy titans Martin and Keaton proved to be an awe-inspiring experience for Williams.

"Steve and Diane treated me as their equal," she said. "They even taught me how to play poker."

Williams said the film taught her a lot about marriage. "I think I'm not going to get married for awhile, especially now that I've gotten it out of my system. She 'got married' 30 times during filming.

When she ties the knot for real, she hopes to emulate her screen counterpart, who wears designer bridal shoes during the ceremony. "It's a lot more comfortable than high heels." ■ Joanne Choi, *Daily Bruin*, U. of California, Los Angeles



strong presence and warmth marks a significant departure from the original and acts to balance George's idiosyncrasies.

Before his daughter returns from a trip abroad, George Banks (Martin) has an ideal life as a successful athletic shoe manu-

facturer with a perfect family and perfect home. When she returns, he discovers that Annie is no longer his little girl.

While enjoying a family dinner, George learns that his 22-year-old baby girl is engaged. A series of humorous and tender

scenes follow as George fights to keep the ever-growing burden of marriage costs from demolishing his picturesque life.

With characteristic charm and humor, Martin wins the audience over as he undergoes more anxiety and trials than the bride-to-be.

The film marks the debut of Northwestern U. junior Kimberley Williams as the free-spirited and feminist Annie. Unlike the original film, Martin must contend with fears that his daughter, an architecture school graduate student, will have to subsidize her husband.

Williams brings wholesomeness and girl-next-door looks to a film that reinforces traditional family values and feminine issues.

The 1991 version includes plenty of modern touches, including Martin Short as Franck, an ultra-hip, artsy-fartsy wedding coordinator whose accent and price list run amok as he struts around like the Mad Hatter.