

Rhythm & Reviews

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Flavorful friendship

Two opposites become friends in Strawberry and Chocolate

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For the Oregon Daily Emerald

It is a well-known fact that some of the best relationships start off on the wrong foot. Initial differences and seeming incompatibilities are often the catalyst toward better understanding and tolerance.

Such is the case with *Strawberry and Chocolate*, a new comedy/drama from award-winning Cuban director Tomas Gutierrez Alea (with Juan Carlos Tabio).

Based on the short story "The Wolf, the Forest and the New Man," by Senel Paz, winner of the Juan Rulfo prize, *Strawberry and Chocolate* is a witty sociopolitical commentary on life in Cuba. The film is set against the backdrop of Havana — a society that looks askance at homosexuality, as well as other personal freedoms.

The film revolves around the tumultuous friendship between David (Vladimir Cruz) and Diego (Jorge Perugorria). They are complete opposites. David studies political science at the university; Diego is an artist. David is uptight; Diego is tolerant. David is standoffish; Diego is embracing. David is straight; Diego is gay.

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Most of the action takes place in Diego's (Jorge Perugorria) apartment.



Jorge Perugorria and Mirta Ibarra star in *Strawberry and Chocolate*, which was nominated for an Academy Award this year.

Strawberry & Chocolate

Vladimir Cruz, Jorge Perugorria and Mirta Ibarra

Director: Tomas Gutierrez

Rated: R

★★★★

information to use against him, he slowly begins to realize that Diego is not the subversive that he once thought he was. Diego is just as much a patriotic Cuban as David is; the only difference being that Diego sees a more democratic and individualized societal reality and that David is just committed to the party line.

The friendship that grows within this entanglement of lifestyles is interesting to behold. Each character is seeking something from the other.

For David, the exposure to an open-minded world outside of his narrow reality is a huge attraction. Diego sees no boundaries, and that freedom, along with his passion for self-discovery is the element that keeps David rapt.

For Diego, the chance to share the beauty of life unbound with a hungry mind is the principle that keeps him engaged past the point of physical attraction. While Diego cannot have David physically, he can share his soul and help David advance in his understanding of himself. The beauty of *Strawberry and Chocolate* is the message of communication that it expresses. Although the acting is rough around the edges at times (with the exception of Diego), the content of the film shines through and exposes a unique and refreshing story that recognizes the value of freedom and personal choice.

'Bombay' examines hostility between Hindus and Muslims

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — A boy-meets-girl romance set against the real-life backdrop of religious riots, has stirred the wrath of nationalist Hindus, conservative Muslims and Indian censors.

Bombay, the most talked-about film in years, has played to packed houses, even though it's been banned in at least one city.

The movie premiered last week in Delhi and Bombay, but distribution in Bombay will be limited to the outer suburbs and will not be shown in sensitive, inner city theaters. Tickets will cost from four to six times the normal maximum price of 80 cents.

Bombay is different from the hundreds of movies produced each year in Bombay, India's film capital: — lighthearted,

escapist thrillers or song-and-dance routines.

Using the courtship and marriage of a Hindu journalist and a Muslim woman, it examines the traditional hostilities between India's 750 million Hindus and its 120 million Muslims.

The Hindu-Muslim theme has been tackled before, usually in the context of distant history. But this story is set against the 1993 riots that engulfed Bombay after Hindu zealots tore down a 300-year-old Muslim shrine in the central Indian town of Ayodhya.

The scars are still fresh, as witnessed by the debate over the movie. More than 800 people were killed in Bombay, a business-minded cosmopolitan city that was long considered a melting pot of cultures.

"It is a marriage between popular and meaningful cinema. It

makes a statement that no one has dared make before," said Khalid Mohammed, one of India's top film critics.

In the movie, the couple defy their tradition-bound families and flee to Bombay to be married. The couple and their young twin boys become caught in the inferno of hatred in the post-Ayodhya riots.

The fear and horror of the rioting is depicted through the twins, who become separated from the parents. A frenzied mob catches them, pours gaso-

line over them and screams, "Hindu or Muslim, Hindu or Muslim."

The scenes of bloodletting are long and gory, but in the end, the families are reconciled. "What is a Hindu and what is a Muslim?" asks one twin of his rescuer. "Two ways to the same god," is the reply.

In India, Hindu-Muslim marriages are unusual, but they are even more rare in movies.

"I relate to the film. The Hindu-Muslim problem exists, riots or no riots," says Nazreen Prasad, a Muslim, who like the heroine in the movie, is married to a Hindu journalist.

When she married, Prasad said, the parents refused to attend. "My father is dead and my brother still doesn't acknowledge my husband's existence," she said.

Critics hail *Bombay* for boldly blaming politicians for playing on communal tensions for political ends.

Director Mani Rathnam is hesitant to speak about his movie because of the continuing controversy.

India's Censor Board found the movie too hot and worried that it might incite trouble. To tone it down, it scissored out news footage of the destruction of the Ayodhya shrine and replaced it with newspaper headlines.

The film played to sell-out crowds for three days in 13 theaters in Hyderabad — which is 50 percent Muslim — before police closed it down following demonstrations against the immodest depiction of a Muslim woman.

Bombay

Director: Mani Rathnam
Not yet in American movie theaters