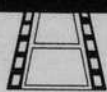


'Polyester': dynamic material or in bad fashion?



FORGOTTEN FILM

'Polyester'

Starring: Divine, Tab Hunter and Edith Massey

★★★★☆ Mason

★★★★☆ Lisa

By Mason West and Lisa Griffing
Oregon Daily Emerald

He Said

In 1981, John Waters broke new cinematic ground reaching out of the screen and grabbing audience members' ... noses. For his film "Polyester," he introduced "odorama," his twisted take on audience participation movies.

The film starts with an introduction to odorama by Dr. Quackenshaw, the fictitious developer of the system. Back in the old days when this movie was playing in theaters, each audience member was given a card with 10 numbers on it, each covering a different scratch-n-sniff area. As the movie progresses, the numbers flash at key times, and the audience scratches the card to experience the odor that the characters in the movie are smelling.

Just like everything else, Waters blows odorama way out of proportion by having characters start sniffing very loudly and poking around before a number is flashed. Meanwhile, we are just sitting there waiting to see what fragrance awaits us with equal anticipation and anxiety.

Quackenshaw warns that although the audience will experience pleasing smells, there will also be bad ones to prove the point that some things in life just stink.

I'll leave the exact smells a secret, but Waters no doubt had a blast knowing that people were voluntarily subjecting their noses to such offensive odors. What can we say? The guy has a twisted sense of humor, and we love it.

"Polyester" stars Divine as Francine Fishpaw, a good Christian housewife in Baltimore. But somehow, this woman's life is surrounded by complete comical chaos. Her husband, Elmer, owns a pornography theater and is hated by the whole town; her daughter is a hoodlum slut who can't stand up without wiggling like Jell-O; and her son is attracted to people's feet and then stomps on them.

The other characters in the movie are equally absurd, but none quite so much as Divine herself. Well, maybe more like himself. The cross-dressing actor was a staple in all of Waters' early films, and though the general public likely knows her as Ricki Lake's mom in "Hairspray," everyone else knows him as "the guy who ate poop" in "Pink Flamingos."

Divine's acting is more over the top than Sylvester Stallone's, but somehow it works. We feel real sympathy that nothing has worked out for this woman for no apparent reason. But at the same time, we laugh at everything that is happening around her.

This is the genius of John Waters. His films are poorly acted and filmed in a way far inferior to the quality that most audiences are now accustomed to, but the real point lies in the action. "Polyester" takes viewers all over the emotional spectrum, confronting issues

such as teen pregnancy, abortion, drugs, alcoholism, religion and delinquency laughing all the way.

But Waters isn't out to offend people. His humor, while done with intentional bad taste, is spread across all genres, not pinpointed at any one group or cause. Divine makes fun of himself as much as he does the good housewife stereotype. In an earlier scene, Lulu drives around with her mischievous boyfriend hitting varied racially stereotyped characters with a broom for no reason other than that she can. To add to the humor, the black gospel singer ends up chasing them down and beating them up.

John Waters invites people to take a step off their soapboxes and just share a common laugh. The only real criticism of the film is that it drags a little, but after letting it sit for a little while all you remember are the laughs. You can choose to be disgusted by the fact that you enjoyed such offensive humor — and you will — or you can choose to keep laughing at the movie and at yourself.

She Said

Out of all of John Waters' campy films, this may be the lightest, excluding my favorite, "Hairspray," but that is not saying much. The family portrayed in "Polyester" was like a twisted version of the '80s show "Married With Children."

Waters weaved stereotypes and clichés into an artistic movie that allows one to see life's annoyances in a humorous light. The bad acting and constant shifts in the plot are the elements that made "Polyester" a bit sugar coated.

The best part about this film is that there are no biases. Waters makes fun of everyone and never reveals his own beliefs on the issues Mason talked about.

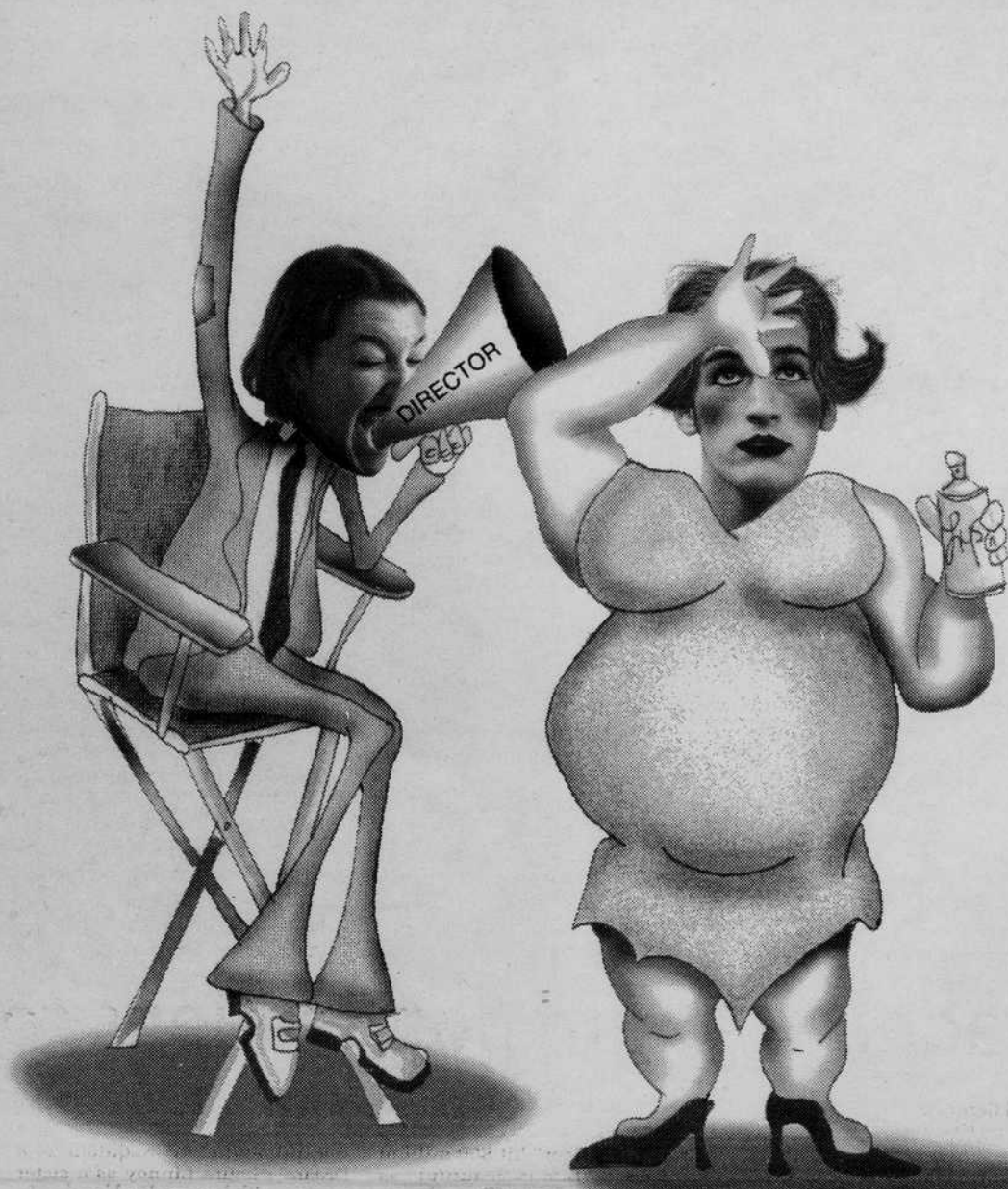
However, I thought this movie was disturbing, and I think it is forgotten for a good reason. For example, Lulu goes to an abortion clinic, and she is ambushed by anti-abortion protesters. Then, she drives home and punches herself again and again in the stomach in order to induce a miscarriage.

How is it funny to watch Francine, who is an overweight, drunken mother, deal with her daughter Lulu's evil, rebellious ways; her drug-addicted son, the foot stomper; and her adulterous, emotionally abusive husband?

The movie is choppy. It goes from the worst extreme a family could be to a sudden recovery when Francine's son Dexter goes to rehab and comes back a painter, and her daughter Lulu comes back a hippie. Peace envelopes the family. Then, things go awry once again when Francine's mother tries to put her in an insane asylum. Afterward, there is a happy ending when everyone dies except Francine, Lulu and Dexter.

Sure, there are plot problems and bad acting, but to make "Polyester" even worse, the dialogue was crude and preposterous. For example, Francine's husband has nothing better to say to her than a series of emotionally damaging remarks such as, "You fat tub of cellulite."

Polyester will surely evoke laughter, and this was not the worst film ever made; however, it was pretty bad. I have to give it two stars, and that is being generous.



Bryan Dixon Emerald

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