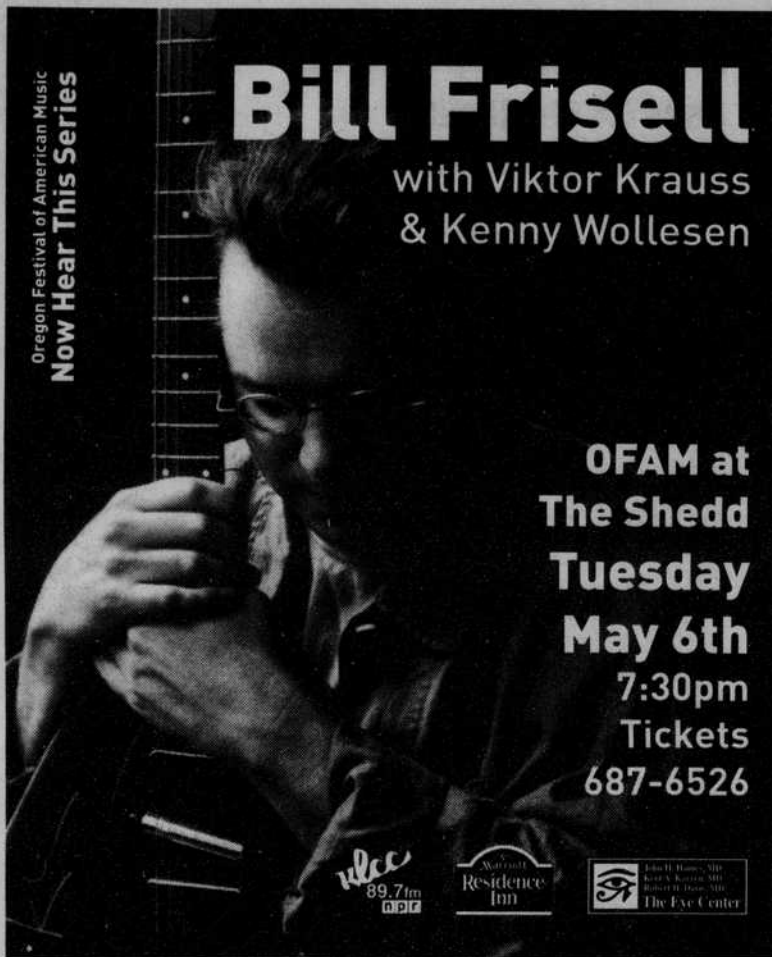


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Lila (Patricia Arquette) and Nathan (Tim Robbins) explore the animal within in "Human Nature."
Courtesy

Movie shows animal instincts

'Human Nature' shows the pursuit of normality through humor, heavy ideas and the line between animal and human

Movie review

Aaron Shakra
Pulse Reporter

It is odd how the film "Human Nature" can be likened to a chameleon — yet oddly fitting. At the core, that's what this film is all about: The line between animal and civilization in the human creature.

This sounds heavy for a film that's about a human who thinks he's an ape, a woman with full body hair and a man on a quest to teach table manners to mice. Starring Tim Robbins, Patricia Arquette and Rhys Ifans, a film like this could only come from Charlie Kaufman, the writer behind "Being John Malkovich," "Adaptation" and, most recently, "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind."

"Human Nature" arrived in theaters in 2002, and is directed by Michel Gondry. The Kaufman/Gondry team will next collaborate on "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," starring Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet, which is set for release later this year.

If the title "Human Nature" sounds unfamiliar, it's because the movie quickly left theaters after an un-ambitious box office run and middling reception from movie critics. This fate is unfortunate, given the film's edgy ideas.

Robbins portrays Nathan Bronfman, a scientific researcher who meets Lila Jute. Lila has to shave her body just to show herself in public, and she secretly undergoes electrolysis while dating Brofman. Then, of course, there's Puff (Ifans), the man who believes himself to be an ape. Puff is introduced into the civilized world

through inhumane techniques; Brofman is essentially willing to do whatever it takes to make Puff a well-mannered human being, including keeping him caged up in his laboratory.

There are potential moments of discomfort for the typical viewer. Heavy ideas are disguised in a whimsical coating. At one point, the issue of conformity literally becomes a song and dance number, in a scene where a nude, hairy Patricia Arquette runs through the woods. There are some eye wincing moments aiming directly at the human being's predilection to the twisted pursuit of normality. This is especially noticeable in scenes between Lila and Nathan — who also becomes involved with his (apparently) French-speaking assistant. Lila basically conforms herself to Nathan's ideas in order to remain with him.

Sex is also a prevalent theme here — or rather, sexual instinct. Puff, with his animalistic background, is led by desire, whereas Nathan is only beginning to come to grips with these feelings. A wicked love triangle is forged between the three main characters. As Nathan is caught cheating, Lila eventually decides to go through with having the rest of her body hair speedily removed. Only then, does Nathan come around to wanting her.

And there are moments of humor here — however, it has the dual effect of being perceived as either deadly serious or deadly funny. When Nathan releases Puff from captivity into the "civilized" world, he warns him, "Remember — when in doubt, don't ever do what you really want to do." The scene leaves the viewer asking, "Is this funny? Or some kind of sad truth?" Kaufman's ideas are just presented, not blatantly slanted, in order to make viewers think one way or the other. Through his characters, we see ourselves and our experiences, which are both sad and beautiful.

Contact the Pulse reporter at aaronshakra@dailymerald.com.

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