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DVD review

DVD release brings viewers 'Closer' to sharp script, deceitful characters

Don't close the door on this film, despite its struggle with intimacy

BY JOSH LINTEREUR
PULSE REPORTER

During fall, the film "Closer" quietly passed through theaters, meeting mixed reviews and small audiences. But, with Oscar-nominated performances and powerful writing, this mostly overlooked film awaits a second chance with audiences after its DVD release last week.

The sharply written script adapted by Patrick Marber from his play tells the story of four characters who begin as strangers and fall in and out of love as they heedlessly betray one another's trust. An unabashed downer of a film, it succeeds for its complicated meditation on intimacy and betrayal.

Natalie Portman's character, Alice, opens the movie with the line, "hey stranger," which ironically cues up an appropriate reminder of how she's a completely different actress when she's not in a galaxy far, far away trading dialogue with Jedis and their computer-animated sidekicks. She received an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress and won a Golden Globe for her performance as a stripper who falls in love with Dan (Jude Law), an obituaries writer.

Portman plays her part with just enough fragility and mysteriousness. Her character's monologue about the sadness behind the subjects in a photography exhibit is the high point of the film. But her inescapable innocence fails to dissipate when she's swinging from a stripper's pole, which hurts the performance.

Law perfectly portrays the sly and emotionally selfish Dan, who is not



COURTESY

From left to right: Clive Owen, Natalie Portman, Julia Roberts and Jude Law star in Mike Nichols' 2004 dark romance, "Closer."

entirely devoid of compassion, as opposed to the caveman-like Larry (Clive Owen). Like Portman, Owen received an Oscar nomination for his supporting role, and won a Golden Globe. His brutish snarl and calculating eyes convey his animalistic inner-workings. Owen is careful not to overcook his performance of the bestial Larry, which bestows him with humanistic depth, rather than reducing him to a predictable cinematic bad seed. This makes it even more devastating when his character delivers an emotional stomach punch to a repentant Dan toward the end of the film.

Julia Roberts rounds out the film's collection of standout performances as Anna, a divorced photographer. She handles the role with appropriately understated melancholy and weariness that is always refreshing from an under-challenged megastar.

The film is masterfully directed by Mike Nichols, who, fresh on the heels of his celebrated 2003 directorial effort, "Angels in America," again adds cinematic style to a stage adaptation. The film liberally jumps through time with minimal cues, which signifies a

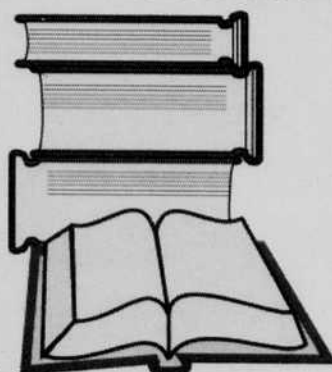
level of respect for the audience rarely seen in modern film, art house or not. He is not afraid to carefully draw out a scene involving an online sex chat between Dan and Larry that is humorously set to classical music.

While the filmmaking stands out, the thematic content becomes burdensome for its disheartening turn of events, which reveal the truth of each character's struggle with intimacy. The sudden emotional detachment that underlies each character's repeated and almost casual infidelities also creates a parallel effect, driving an emotional distance between the audience and the film. The emotional power of the film lessens under the weight of dysfunctional characters that are almost unbearable in their ability to cause so much pain.

The artistry and complicated themes at work in "Closer" make it a natural for some superb extras, such as a commentary from Nichols or Marber, but sadly the paltry DVD only includes a music video and previews for other films.

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