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It's a dog's life

This Swedish import feels more like Woody Allen than Ingmar Bergman.

BY ELEANOR MALIN

MY LIFE AS A DOG

Written by: Lasse Hallstrom and Reidar Johnson

Directed by: Lasse Hallstrom

Starring: Anton Glazelius

His mom is coughing blood, his dog's in the kennel, his dad's running bananas somewhere in Central America, and he's been sent to live

Cinema

with a country cousin who seems like an amalgam of Ozzie Nelson, Jack Tripper and Mortimer Snerd. The old guy downstairs is dying, very slowly, and the young boy experiencing all the family turbulence, while muddling through adolescent turbu-

lence, has grown to identify with Laika, the Soviet canine cosmonaut, who slowly starved to death when her doggie bag finally got empty.

How can this be a comedy? It can be, if it's done very carefully.

The second son of two, Ingmar is too rambunctious to remain with his mother. She has started down that relentless road to death, and needs her rest. Ingmar is sent to live with a cousin and his wife, who share a rented company house with an older couple. The old geezer keeps a catalogue and gets Ingmar to read him the lingerie ads. Most of the people who work in the rural setting seem to work at the glass factory. There aren't very many recreational options. The soccer's nice, but how many times can you play "I've Got A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts" and really appreciate it?

Sex seems pandemic, or is it just Ingmar? Those Swedes from the country must

be an exuberant lot, and the subject of sex is gotten next to, thought well of, knitted over everything else.

Ingmar misses Sicken, his dog, and his fragile mother, in that order. Amidst denials, reckonings, affirmations, and not knowing what's happening to his dog (Mom!), Ingmar picks his way through the friendships, flirtations and competition, with a lot of help from his friends. This is a little town where all the men are in love with Berit, the blonde *ur*-mother. Most of the little girls are in love with Ingmar. Ingmar experiences tumultuous changes, familial changes, physical changes, separation and death. He approaches deepening relationships, grave losses and burgeoning sexual awakening all at the same time, as best he can. Like Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *My Life As A Dog* treats the human condition, in all its saddest depths and most glorious highs. All the generations are represented affectionately. Amidst embarrassment, pathos, death and despair, life does go on, and any number of hearts do beat as one.

The future lies in kinky people, really

Because those kinky people are us, really.

BY ELEANOR MALIN

PERSONAL SERVICES

Written by: David Leland

Directed by: Terry Jones

Starring: Julie Walters, Alec McCowen, Shirley Stelfox

She gave up a paunchy businessman with a little Willie to start her own business. Ambition, natural leadership ability, and the knack of noticing what sells cause Christine Painter, heroine of this bawdy comedy, to notice she can make a lot of money hostessing sex for men with specialized interests. When she embarks on her new career, she doesn't even know what French polishing is, even though she has posted an ad for it. Christine displays chutzpah, good humor, and experiences good luck and a supportive clientele. (One enthusiastic customer loans her money from his bank to finance her little lust nest; others pay to do her yard work — she's such a good taskmistress.) Christine builds a thriving business catering to men with kinky tastes. The English have been so repressed and so kinky for so long it's become genetically imprinted. I

expect *Lancet* to announce the location of the gene for kink any day now. And it is funny. Guys in rubber suits tied up in lock boxes. Guys in schoolgirl outfits being whipped for being late. An aged wing commander who flew 217 missions in bra and panties. A reporter asks him if it's true Christine supplied sex to men in wheelchairs. She did, "for a minimum charge, of course."

Julie Walters is tawdry perfection as the energetic strumpet, Christine Painter. Loosely modeled after Cynthia Payne, the celebrated madame whose case came up before a magistrate who was one of her regular customers, Walters makes everything that can be made of this role. She oozes good natured rational thinking. She sees through bullshit like cellophane, and analyzes the profound social schizophrenia happening around her with acerbic wit. There's more than a little irony dished up when you stop to think that the people who finance and patronize prostitutes are the same ones who make and enforce laws against them.

Merry madcappery occurs throughout this very funny film, with solid support

from McCowan and Stelfox, who as a "mature" purveyor of personal services comes off as shopworn, sagacious, and a nice person.

In a year proffering several films on the subject of prostitution, two of them comedies from a realistic viewpoint, one wonders what can be going on. Unlike Lizzie Borden's film, *Working Girls*, which satirizes the johns and emphasizes the sisterhood of prostitutes, *Personal Services* features the inextricable relationship of hookers to the community and the community to hookers.

"La Bamba" premieres July 10

Written and directed by Luis Valdez (*Zoot Suit*), and starring Lou Diamond Phillips as Ritchie Valens, Esai Morales and Elizabeth Pena (*Down and Out in Beverly Hills*), *La Bamba* premieres at Oregon Art Institute's NW Film & Video Center at 8:00 p.m., Friday, July 10.

Music by Los Lobos recreates the Valens sound, somewhat updated. Should be good. For more info, call 221-1156.

— Eleanor Malin

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