

Relearning to live

The Waterdance gets an "A" for ethnic sensitivity, "B" for gay awareness and "C+" for treatment of women



(l to r) William Forsythe, Eric Stoltz and Wesley Snipes

by Sandra de Helen

The Waterdance stars Eric Stoltz, Wesley Snipes, William Forsythe, and Helen Hunt. The script is by Neal Jimenez who also (with Michael Steinberg) directs. This story of how three men learn to cope with disability, growing and changing in the process, is interesting, moving, and educational. It can be graded "A" for ethnic sensitivity, "B" for gay awareness, and "C+" for how it treats women.

The film begins by showing us what life looks like from the point of view of a head-injured patient on a gurney. Initially, the movie looks almost like a documentary, particularly when Joel (Eric Stoltz) is being interviewed by a psychologist and we see the depth and breadth of his denial. "I'm a writer, so I don't really need my legs." Within a few minutes, it loses its documentary flavor and gains our rapt attention as the characters begin to develop before our eyes.

Over time we learn each of the main characters' stories about how they have all ended up in a physical rehab facility to regain whatever physical control they can and to learn how to live with the realities of their new lifestyle — in a chair. Ray is an African-American, Bloss is a European-American member of a motorcycle pack, and Joel is the writer whose ethnic background is revealed at a moment which needs — and receives — the much needed shot of humor the revelation provides.

Each of the men have "their" women: Joel has his married girlfriend (Helen Hunt) who figures prominently throughout the film; Bloss has his middle-aged, working class (but apparently not working), somewhat flaky mother; Ray has an estranged wife and child. Each man faces his future in his own unique way. Joel can still write, Bloss plans to win a two million dollar lawsuit against the motorist who hit him, but Ray faces a life of dependence.

As they build emotional and physical strength, the men face various kinds of pain. The audience sees a range of possibilities for dealing with the crushing blow of sudden disability. At the end of rehab they may be only physically challenged, but at the beginning the challenges are psychological

and spiritual as well.

The Waterdance is the first popular film to deal with the sexuality of men in chairs in a realistic way. Other movies have shown us a romanticized version of people making love, but this one shows us reality. First we see the lecture scene (where the men hear the realities they will face) and then actual sex scenes where the participants face the frustration and fears in the first attempts at making love with the challenges of paralysis. Again, the writer and directors use humor as well as information and sensitivity to bring these realities home.

Joel and Anna (Hunt) are first drawn closer together by his accident, but soon are in conflict when Joel insists that she tell her husband about them and make a choice. When they fight and she doesn't visit him for three weeks, he is forced to look to his ward-mates for support. Joel comes to understand that while he needs and wants Anna, at the same time he hates her for her ability to walk.

Ray, who up 'til now has been the world's worst husband, suddenly realizes how much he loves his wife and daughter. He wants desperately to start over with his wife and to have her see what life could be like with the changes he wants to make. Unfortunately, it becomes clear that it is too late for their marriage when the wife and child show up for a visit only to have him sign the divorce papers.

Bloss faces his own ignorance and fears and is finally driven to seek the friendship of the other men on the ward when one of his motorcycle buddies shares the truth about the accident with him.

The men bond to the point that Bloss and Joel storm a bureaucratic boondoggle to try to save Ray from a threatened suicide. In the process, the film-makers show us the frustration of inaccessible buildings without ever mentioning it.

Except for the fact that this is a heterosexual men's movie, (and face it, most of them are) this is a film worth seeing for its portrayal of some of the challenges faced by people in chairs. With the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we can look forward to the day when all U.S. citizens are afforded the accessibility necessary to fully participate in life. We can also hope for more films, plays, books, magazines, and so on to enlighten us as to the lives of all of us. The Waterdance is opening at an Act III theater soon.

CINEMA

THE OTHER
QUEENS'
BALL
THE PARTY AFTER THE PARADE
PORTLAND
OREGON CONVENTION CENTER
SAT JUNE 6TH

THE OTHER
QUEENS'
BALL
THE PARTY AFTER THE PARADE
PORTLAND
OREGON CONVENTION CENTER
SAT JUNE 6TH

THE OTHER
QUEENS'
BALL
THE PARTY AFTER THE PARADE
PORTLAND
OREGON CONVENTION CENTER
SAT JUNE 6TH

Free
Queens'
Shuttle
Service

From the Party to
Downtown Bars

Every half hour from 8:00 pm to 2:00 am

Brought to you by
Embers • CC Slaughters
the Fish Grotto • Flossies

Don't Miss The
Queens'
Sunday
Brunch

Sunday, June 7

11:00 am - 3:00 pm

Hobo's Inn

120 NW Third

1992. Portland, Oregon.

You are considering a major real estate transaction. You know that the right agent is essential to the success of your transaction.

How do you find that person?

Choose a Portland native with a decade's experience building custom homes, doing restorations and remodels— someone who knows houses from foundation to façade. Choose a real estate agent who genuinely cares about you and your priorities.

And, finally, choose an agent with an extensive background in financing residential investment opportunities.

Whether your transaction is a sale, the purchase of your first home, a step up, or a piece of residential investment property, you'll want an agent who can put all the pieces together, in a timely fashion.



The year, 1992. The place, Portland, Oregon.
The real estate agent—

TIM WALTERS
The time: Today.

PORTLAND
PROPERTIES

2021 Lloyd Center
Portland, OR 97232
(503) 287-3322

Call me at (503) 287-3322, or
at my home (503) 635-1188.