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MAGNOLIAS AND ENDEARMENTS ON THE SIDE

Revealing movie trailers and comparisons to other films weaken the impact of *Boys On the Side*

by Rupert Kinnard

Readers be warned: in reviewing the new movie *Boys On the Side*, I will have to reveal a number of plot elements that I sincerely believe are best left unknown before you see the film—if you haven't already. This is my attempt to be more sensitive to you as a moviegoer than the people who produced the trailer for the movie, because it would surprise me if anyone reading this hadn't already been exposed to a lot of the

before they settle down into an extended family unit in Tucson.

Though there was something that felt really historic about a film that dealt with a woman living with AIDS, I did feel that director Herbert Ross managed to weave that and the lesbian aspect into the fabric of the story in a way that didn't sensationalize either situation.

I know there are a lot of people who love Whoopi Goldberg. When the movie was over, the women around me in the theater started talking about rating the movie by stars—four stars being the highest. I gave the movie two and a half stars, but they were awarding the movie stars just for Whoopi and some of the film's musical surprises. I understand this because I would have to admit that any movie Brad Pitt appears in these days would at least get half a star for that fact alone. But Whoopi is a difficult actor for me to embrace in the same way. I think it is true that if people like Whoopi Goldberg, that's pretty much what they get, even though the movie might've called for another character. Part of the problem for me is the fact that she so often wears her hair the same

Cinema

plot. Like so many movies that are advertised by previews which reveal so much of the film that when you finally see them the spontaneity of certain key scenes are lost, *Boys On the Side* suffers due to what many of us have already seen.

The other advertising phenomenon that potentially ruins a film for me, is the comparison between a new movie and other movies of the same genre. You can't imagine how quickly I was turned off to this movie when it was described as another *Terms of Endearment* and *Steel Magnolias*. My first thought is "Why?" We've already done *Steel Magnolias* and *Terms of Endearment*. In fact Debra Winger, who starred in *Terms of Endearment*, did do *Endearment* again, most recently in *Shadowlands*, where she dies of the same disease. Not that these were bad movies, but when people tell you that a new movie is produced in the same tradition of a couple of older movies I can't help but feel that the movies will have a very noticeable, calculated feel to them. It is one thing for a filmmaker to simply tell a story and in the end we,



Drew Barrymore (left) and Whoopi Goldberg

as an audience, end up being emotionally moved. It's another thing to construct a movie in a way that lets you know that the filmmaker is doing all she or he can to move you. Thus it almost seems necessary for him or her to let us know that we're getting ready to see a *Steel Magnolias*-type movie, so we can prepare our tear ducts in advance.

way that she might've worn it last night on *Late Night with David Letterman*. I guess she has such a distinct look (have you ever noticed that she has no eyebrows?) that I find it's difficult for me to accept her in most roles, unless she actually does undergo some physical transformation as I feel she did in movies like *The Long Walk Home* and even *Sister Act*.

None of this is to say that I didn't enjoy *Boys On the Side*. It just so happens that the movie would've been more enjoyable without the level of exposure surrounding it. And this was the case even though I saw the movie before it was officially released. Like *Endearment* and *Magnolias*, the movie deals with the bonding that happens between a group of women only to have a terminal disease come between them. The twist with *Boys* is that Jane (Whoopi Goldberg) is a lesbian musician who attempts to escape from New York City by ride-sharing with Robin (Mary-Louise Parker), who suffers from a terminal disease which happens to be AIDS. They eventually pick up Holly (Drew Barrymore) and become involved in rescuing her from an abusive relationship. From that point on, the story is about how they all bond, and some of the adventures they share on the road

I did enjoy the other actors in *Boys*, even though I tend to love Drew Barrymore more for camp value than anything else. I also thought there were some refreshing aspects of the story, such as the sweet nature of Holly's cop boyfriend and Robin's bartending buddy. Though, as revolutionary as some people seem to think this film is, the one lesbian in the film certainly wasn't awarded any type of love interest beyond the love that the three women developed for one another. The overall connection between the three main women was very nice to watch, but I couldn't help but want to see new ground broken in the area of relationships between women in film. And, true to the advertisements, *Boys On the Side* bore a closer resemblance to *Steel Magnolias* and *Terms of Endearment* than I would've liked.

PHOTO BY SUZANNE HANOVER