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OUT AT THE MOVIES

WHEN NIGHT IS **FALLING**

Pascale Bussières, Rachael Crawford Directed by Patricia Rozema

ozema's last feature, I've Heard the Mermaids Singing, was a refreshingly candid film about a perfectly nice Girl Friday who becomes the secret admirer of a monstrously selfindulgent dyke art dealer battling a major mid-life crisis. Funny, awkward and painfully naive, Mermaids heroine Polly had lots of charming rough edges. In contrast, the heroine of Rozema's latest film, When Night Is Falling, is a perfectly bland puritan supermodel—the kind of woman who never

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perspires, gets dirty or messes up her hair, much less shows any real emotion. Likewise, the film, while pleasant to look at, has none of the heart or intelligence that those of us who adored Mermaids would expect.

Even the story line of Night lacks originality. A good Christian professor with a cold-but-devoted, man-of-the-cloth fiancé (played by the actor who played the pedophile in The Boys of St. Vincent's),

the discipline (and perhaps the talent) to actually have the career she dreams of and thinks she deserves. She lives to be on stage, seducing anyone who can get her there, even if it's only as part of a third-rate band playing cheap wedding receptions. Sadie's whole life has been spent in the shadow of her gentle, older sister Georgia (Winningham), now a successful folk singer, whose life is balanced between stadiums full of thousands of screaming fans and a quiet family life with her husband and children. So, the tension builds-Georgia has everything; Sadie is a royal fuck-up.

As usual Leigh is brilliant and frighteningly convincing in this, her latest harrowing role, and the situation is rich with potential. Both Georgia and Sadie are loving and intelligent characters, both charming yet at times repulsively self-indulgent. Unfortunately, the story ends exactly where it started—making the film a long, frustrating and torturous experience.

LEAVING LAS VEGAS

Elizabeth Shue, Nicholas Cage Directed by Mike Figgis

ike Carrington, Leaving Las Vegas is an unusual love story about a man and a woman head over heels in love with each other, who live together but don't have sex, once again making the point that sometimes the two

don't go together. Vegas, however, is no pastoral period piece—it is very much set in the harsh, soulless '90s-and our two protagonists are straight and have absolutely no claim to fame or fortune. He's a terminal drunk who can't get it up, and she's a hooker. Their paths cross one night as what should be a routine sexual encounter turns into



Rachael Crawford (left) and Pascale Bussières in When Night Is Falling

falls for a slightly predatory female African American circus performer. Now tell me: What is it about dykes and academics (think Lianna, Desert Hearts, Claire of the Moon)? What is it about dykes and religious women (think Breaking the Silence: Lesbian Nuns)? Why do so many films focus on women in relationships with secure-but-passionless men whom they leave for bohemian, chaotic women—is this the formula for the lesbian version of a Harlequin Romance? And why have the Cirque du Soleil-esque character be a woman of color, when issues of race are never addressed?

The film's distributor, October Films, claims that Night has the best lesbian love scenes ever to hit the big screen, and on this one point I must agree. The company has also been protesting the film's NC-17 rating, which seems to be based entirely on the fact that the explicit sex happens between two women. (What's more, the film's lush, seductive ad was recently rejected by The New York Times.)

While the lesbophobia surrounding the film makes my blood boil, unfortunately, the film itself leaves me cold.

GEORGIA

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Jennifer Jason Leigh, Mare Winningham Directed by Ulu Grosbard

adie (Leigh) is a stylish, '90s, Janis Joplintype rebel, a raging smack addict/alcoholic and an ambitious mock rock star, who lacks something oddly intimate. Which isn't to say that things aren't tragic, but these two accept each other as they are and a tenuous love survives.

Shue (yes, she's the sister of the actor who plays Billy on Melrose Place) is fantastic—tough and streetwise, yet hauntingly vulnerable. While other current films set in Las Vegas focus on people who gamble, win big, then lose it all, Leaving Las Vegas is about the nameless, faceless, "unlucky" people who feed the machine. The message? You may not be able to save the one you love. but the act of loving can save and transform you.

QUEER MOVIE BUZZ

rew Barrymore thrilled the crowd when she showed up at a humble drag king event in New York. Cross-dressing is something she needs to study for her upcoming film role based on the true life story of brutally murdered female-to-male transsexual Brandon Teena.

Coming in January is Antonia's Line by Marleen Gorris, the director of the Dutch feminist classic A Question of Silence; in the spring we can look forward to seeing Lili Taylor as Valerie Solanas (the author of the man-hating SCUM manifesto) in I Shot Andy Warhol, produced by queer film powers Tom Kalin and Christine Vachon.

Reviews by Cathay Che, a cinephile and writer who lives in New York City.