

All Over Me is a color I've never seen before. Thousands of coming-of-age stories, which this is, have come before it. So have other gritty summer tales set in New York City. And while parts of this film evoke the same feelings as *Kids* or *Smoke*, the values that conceived this touching poem are from somewhere alien by comparison.

Written by Sylvia Sichel and directed by her sister, Alex Sichel, *All Over Me* employs some

Cinema

clichés that give the audience its bearings. Stories about adolescents losing their supposed innocence often contain a death (*Stand By Me*, *River's Edge*). So does this. They're made of misplaced crushes and mentors (*My Life as a Dog*, *The Year My Voice Broke*). So is this.

These tried-and-true elements take on new faces, though, when seen through the eyes of a 15-year-old girl in a film crafted by women.



Producer Dolly Hall (left) and director Alex Sichel

Adolescence, probably the most profound period in a person's development, does not seem so horrible or surreal when presented by this team. It looks more like childbirth: there is pain, screaming and blood. But it seems like a natural progression. A newborn foal stumbling about covered in a layer of blood and mucous may be initially repulsive, but is really rather beautiful.

Claude (Alison Folland), who is the center of this study, steps as awkwardly as a newborn into the minefield of her adolescent evolution. As *All Over Me* begins, in Hell's Kitchen on the eve of summer vacation, Claude bears little resemblance

GRRRLS TOWN

All Over Me shows the pain and persistence of a wannabe rocker who wants love where she can't get it

by Will O'Bryan

to the desperate, abrasive teen Folland introduced us to in Gus Van Sant's *To Die For*. Their greatest link is their lack of confidence. As Folland matures, it's going to be harder for her to play the awkward anything. She's come into a grace too innate to be tamed.

Claude begins to navigate the teen minefield with her best friend, Ellen (Tara Subkoff). Ellen is Claude's childhood friend and her obsession. Claude plays the tortoise to Ellen's hare, slowly but steadily finding her way as Ellen rushes about carelessly, full of misplaced confidence.

Subkoff's presence in *All Over Me* is the film's eeriest element. She does look like the 15-year-old she portrays. She also looks like the Whore of Babylon. Frighteningly, again, this seems natural. The Sichels

Briggs' fresh face is new to film. With his streaked hair, eye-liner, grunge fashion sense and stretched smile, it's not immediately obvious whether he's an idiot, psychotic pedophile, wayward boy scout, sinner or saint.

For Claude, whose hero worship is largely reserved for Patti Smith, he's simply something new and appealing. She respects him because, like her, he plays the guitar. Furthermore he represents the alienated world of rock and punk that Claude's exploring. If Luke carries himself as an authentic Mr. Rock 'n' Roll, it's because Briggs is front man for the band Psychotica. His queerness seems authentic, too.

The theme of music being the vehicle for teen angst expression and deliverance is a chord that runs the length of *All Over Me*. Claude first spies her eventual love-interest, Lucy (Leisha Hailey), in a guitar shop. They can't help but examine each other, the only females in the store. It's a scene

teen-queer story, works with Claude. Cruz enjoyed a measure of fame acting with Clare Danes on ABC's *My So-Called Life*. Considering these two roles, as well as Cruz's parts in *Johns* and *On Seventh Avenue*, a very bad made-for-TV movie about the fashion industry, no one in this decade could've possibly played more gay-teen characters.

Cole Hauser plays Mark, Ellen's no-good, drug-pushing, violent boyfriend. His film credits include *Dazed and Confused* and *Higher Learning*. The Mark character is two dimensional, and Hauser plays it well. He won't really look threatening till he gets a bit older. From then on, he'll be able to look forward to a long string of gun-toting roles.

Folland has only a few scenes with Ann Dowd, who plays Claude's mother, but the scenes are telling. Mom and Claude illustrate some of the varying ranks and roles of women in our society as well as generational differences. Cigarette in hand, Claude's mother delivers a lecture on health and diet while nursing a hangover and a can of generic low-cal "milkshake." The importance of diet being relevant to Claude's mother roughly in that skinny girls get boys.

Claude's adolescent crush on best friend Ellen may stem from her relationship with her mother. Conventional wisdom holds that girls grow up to love men like their fathers. Claude grows up to



Tara Subkoff (left) and Alison Folland

manage to present Ellen as someone not pitiable or despicable, but as someone who frustrates the audience as much as she frustrates Claude. It's exhausting to watch Ellen go down all the tempting dark paths that most audience members will remember from their own pubescence. The frustration lies in knowing absolutely that the girl is as doomed as any Pandora.

Other characters share the few-city-blocks setting. Luke (Pat Briggs) is one part "shotgun over the mantle" and one part Claude's muse.

made to feel so male-oriented that the guitars lining the walls may as well have been urinals.

Like Briggs, Hailey also has more experience with music than film. She sings with The Murmurs. (That's reported to carry some weight in Norway and Australia.)

Other faces in the neighborhood are more familiar. Jesse (Wilson Cruz), the boy side of the

love a woman like her mother: Ellen and Mom both abandon Claude for men.

As Claude, inspired by Luke, ventures out into the world of riot grrrls, it's initially hard for her to trust the new breed of women. But she does learn how to trust, and it leads to what is now my favorite on-screen kiss.

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