

**FILMS**

**THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY**

Although this film has been playing for several weeks now, the queer angle wasn't played up in advance, so some readers may not be aware of its gay appeal.

Though Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* had been filmed before (as 1960's great French import *Purple Noon*), the clear homosexual responsiveness of its protagonist wasn't brought to the fore. There's no mistaking it in the current screen adaptation, directed by Anthony Minghella (*The English Patient*) and starring Matt Damon as Tom Ripley, Jude Law as Dickie Greenleaf, and Gwyneth Paltrow as Marge Sherwood. Cate Blanchett and Phillip Seymour Hoffman, superior actors in this company, offer comic relief in tiny, though pivotal, roles.

It's the late 1950s, before widespread sexual liberation and student rebellion. Tom Ripley is asked by Dickie Greenleaf's rich father to go to Italy to retrieve his son, who's squandering his allowance and pursuing a hedonistic Americans-abroad lifestyle with his girlfriend, Marge. Brilliant but poor, Tom envies the wealth and love Dickie takes for granted, and sees his errand as an opportunity. He's used to misrepresenting himself to get in with the upper crust, and he draws on these skills at every turn with Dickie and Marge. But when he's exposed, his underlying jealousy and sexual repression turn murderous.

A recent *New Yorker* review of the film suggested that Patricia Highsmith was "turned on by same-sex relations and openly scornful of female characters drab enough to love one man." This may explain the villainous nature of Paltrow's character; if Law's Dickie is a spoiled rich brat, her Marge is a spoiled rich brat who's also an unbearable busybody. It's Mr. Ripley, as the title suggests, who's the hero of this film, despite his crimes. Damon plays him as a tense bundle of Freudian nerves; Tom's longing for Dickie is both sympathetic and highly erotic.

Though the film is too shallow and Oscar-grubbing to be anywhere near great—it's shot in that superficially grandiose style that signifies "art" to Academy voters—it is, aside from its appealing sensuality, one of 1999's more artistically successful mainstream films. It's currently showing at various locations.

—Christopher McQuain

**SHOW ME LOVE**

Even if you're a snooty moviegoer with a low tolerance for underdeveloped plots, the Swedish coming-of-age film *Show Me Love* will touch you in some way.

This independent movie is the foreign equivalent to *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love*, but this story isn't as thickly layered as its American counterpart.

Instead of relying on plot to grab attention, the director and screenwriter, Lukas Moodysson, develops his characters into highly realistic beings. One of these characters is Agnes, a young dyke and pariah. She is known around the school as the one you're not supposed to sit with at lunch; she's the butt of many jokes.

She also happens to have a crush on Elin, who is upheld as one of the school's favorite personalities. We spend the first part of the movie watching Agnes get dumped on and Elin get drunk, then we begin to notice a shift. Though she pretends to be preoccupied with a boy, Elin becomes interested in Agnes and does the seemingly most obvious thing to let her know: She ignores her.

Moodysson's emphasis on realism lies in the film's minute details. His characters are dressed in wannabe American garb, and the sound-



PHOTO BY PHIL BRAY

Boys in the band in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Fruit salad**

The current crop of new films is as diverse as the queer community

track is young and European without too much of that cheesy *My So Called Life* sort of feeling.

Agnes and Elin are played by two amazingly convincing young actresses, Rebecca Liljeberg and Alexandra Dahlström; they both put on heart-capturing performances with hardly any other acting experience from which to pull.

*Show Me Love*, which plays Jan. 21 through 27 at Cinema 21 in Portland, is a simple, warm viewing experience.

—Katy Davidson

**ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER**

Spanish filmmaker who has directed 14 features since 1980, Pedro Almodóvar has attracted an avid international following with his unique style. His candy-colored, flamboyant films almost invariably feature beautiful women and handsome men of all sexual persuasions, and usually at least one dignified transsexual heroine, tossed into a frothy (but hardly shallow) confection of drama, sex, camp, intrigue, suspense and comedy. Almodóvar brings to the screen a rather more literal interpretation of *la vida loca* than the one Ricky Martin has popularized.



Girls who like girls in *Show Me Love*

In his latest, *All About My Mother*, Almodóvar's idiosyncratic vision has sharper dramatic focus, but none of his trademark humor or flamboyance is lost.

At the beginning of the film, Manuela (Cecilia Roth) takes her son Esteban to a performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* for his 17th birthday. Fascinated by the lead actress, Huma Rojo (Maria Paredes), Esteban runs after her taxi, aggressively seeking her autograph,

and is hit and killed by an oncoming car. The rest of the film follows heartbroken Manuela from Madrid to Barcelona, where the father Esteban never knew, a preoperative transsexual named Lola, resides. Lola, who has been working as a prostitute, is difficult to track down, but Manuela's search leads her to a makeshift family of women, both biological and preoperative: Lola's ex-roommate Agrado, another transsexual; Sister Rosa, a nun who is carrying Lola's most recent offspring; and, most unexpectedly, Huma Rojo. The actress is experiencing difficulties of her own with her lover and co-star, Nina, a young woman with a heroin habit. As her relationship with Nina deteriorates, Huma finds the support of her new friends indispensable.

*All About My Mother*, now playing at KOIN Cinemas in Portland, delivers humor, self-discovery, female bonding and no small degree of tenderness. The film is Almodóvar's tribute to the maternal origin we all share; he dedicates it "to all women who have played actresses. To all women who are mothers. To my mother." —CM

**SWEET AND LOWDOWN**

Even those who normally scorn Woody Allen—either because of his '90s tabloid notoriety or his always-stuttering, neurotic screen persona—may want to treat themselves to his latest, *Sweet and Lowdown*.

The film stars Sean Penn as fictional 1930s jazz guitarist Emmet Ray. Supposedly second only to real-life jazz guitar great Django Reinhardt, Ray is *only* good at playing his guitar. Otherwise, he's a womanizing, deceitful, egotistical kleptomaniac whose personal life is constantly in shambles. His most beautiful music, however, comes only after his heart has been broken by his true love, a mute but strong-willed woman played by the endearing Samantha Morton, whose performance has earned comparisons to Charlie Chaplin.

Allen subtly, if somewhat self-servingly, raises the point that many great, publicly beloved artists not only suffer for their work, they make those around them suffer as well.

As in nearly all of Allen's films, the photography is fluid and gorgeous, the writing and performances fine, and an intellectual, post-modern sense of bemused detachment is combined easily with old-fashioned movie romanticism. *Sweet and Lowdown*, which opens Jan. 21 at the Broadway Metroplex in downtown Portland, stands with the best of his work. —CM

**THE BRIAN EPSTEIN STORY**

Part of the Northwest Film Center's Reel Music Festival, this documentary recreates the short life of the Beatles' first manager, who happened to be gay. *The Brian Epstein Story* includes archival footage and audio tape, interviews with former lovers, as well as an extensive interview with Paul McCartney, who talks openly about Epstein's orientation.

As to the persistent rumors that Epstein had a fling with John Lennon, Lennon himself is heard on an audio tape addressing the issue: "We didn't have an affair...but I liked playing a bit faggy—it was enjoyable."

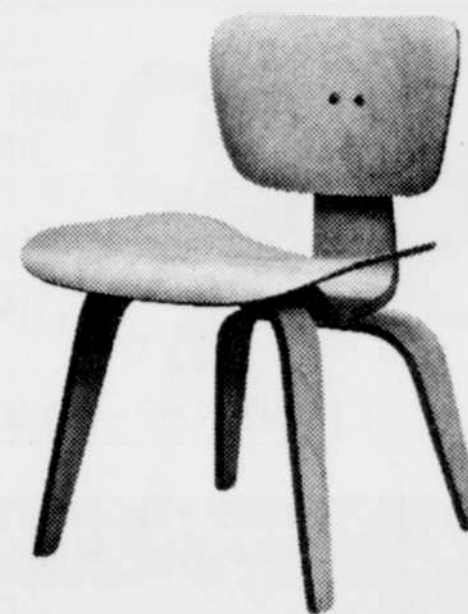
For all his wealth and success, Epstein appears to have been quite miserable and lonely and, like most of his musical discoveries, deeply involved in the drug scene of 1960s mad, mod London.

Only recommended for die-hard Beatles fans, it plays at 7 p.m. Jan. 29 at the Guild Theatre in Portland.

—Oriana Green

■ CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Portland-based writer and tireless observer of pop culture.

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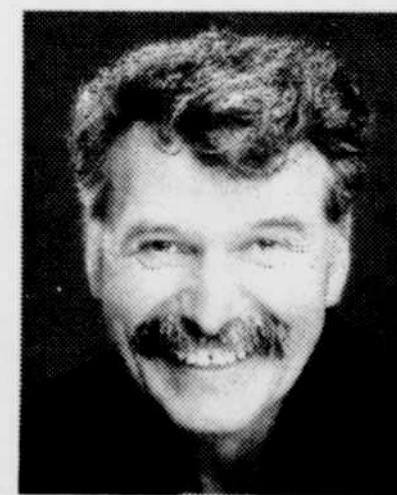
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