

FILMS

ERIN BROCKOVITCH
Julia Roberts, Albert Finney
 Directed by Steven Soderbergh

This is no formulaic, fragile, fine-boned Julia Roberts role. As the title character in this inspiring drama, Roberts proves she can do more than flash that megawatt smile. This is a true story about an undereducated woman who stumbles onto a cause, sets out to save an entire town full of people and saves her own life in the bargain.

At first glance, Brockovitch the character comes off as a classic victim—a twice-divorced woman with three small kids to raise on her own—but her desperation for a job reveals her true grit. After a seedy, down-on-his-luck lawyer (brilliantly played by Albert Finney) fails to win her some money after an auto accident, Brockovitch turns around and demands a job from him: "I'm smart, I'm hardworking and I'll do anything—and I'm not leaving here without a job." Then she whispers, "Don't make me beg."

Though she has absolutely no apparent skills to qualify her for work in a law office, Brockovitch does have a self-confidence born



Boobs away! Julia Roberts gest busty in *Erin Brockovitch*

of a mother's need to feed her kids. She also rather dramatically lacks a proper wardrobe or even the desire to attain one, and that too eventually works to her advantage. (Lest you think the miniskirted, streaky-haired Roberts with her hydraulically-engineered cleavage is exaggerating the look of her real-life counterpart, pay close attention to the waitress in the restaurant scene and you'll see the real Erin Brockovitch, who is even more buxom than Roberts and, as she admitted on *Oprah*, wears her skirts even shorter than Roberts does in the film.)

In spite of her wardrobe, which turns this movie into a breast fest, Brockovitch clearly is a bright woman who traded her potential for much-too-early motherhood. There are poignant moments when she recalls her youthful hopes: "I was Miss Wichita. I still have my tiara—I thought it meant I was gonna do something important with my life," she tells her love interest in the film.

The guy, George, comes off as a skanky, unappealing, rough-trade sort of guy but turns out to be a Harley rider with a heart of gold—and a willingness to baby-sit. When George tells Brockovitch that she has great kids, she replies with hardheaded realism: "I'm sure I'll fuck 'em up eventually."

What she doesn't fuck up is her job at the law firm. Her natural curiosity uncovers corporate environmental rape of epic proportions and sucks her into a relentless search for the truth. The wonderful surprise about this film is

the unexpected richness of the script. Roberts has a ball playing this fast-talking, no-nonsense gal who'll do just about anything to achieve her goal. As she begins to make progress with the case, her self-esteem grows accordingly.

"For the first time in my life I've got people respecting me," she tells George as she tries to make him understand why she can't quit, even though her kids are suffering from her long hours away from them.

This is a complex story, yet *Erin Brockovitch* conveys the huge scope of its plot in an involving manner. Roberts' heartfelt performance as a strong woman of amazonian proportions should win her new respect. It's scheduled to open March 17 at area theaters. —*Oriana Green*

THE BRANDON TEENA STORY
 Directed by Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir

Brandon Teena—a young biological female who lived mentally, physically and emotionally as a man, and who was brutally raped and murdered along with two other people in Nebraska in 1993—has fascinated movie audiences for the past several months through *Boys Don't Cry*, the excellent 1999 fictionalized

film about the incident.

But what about the real people involved in this horror story? The documentary *The Brandon Teena Story*, released in 1998 to underground and festival acclaim, has recently been made available on videocassette and DVD.

Unlike *Boys Don't Cry*, which portrayed Teena's life and death in vivid, gut-wrenching firsthand detail, *The Brandon Teena Story* is retrospective. Filmed after the demise of its subject, it is unable to show us the real Teena. Instead, we get to know his story through snap-

shots, letters and the people around him.

There are interviews with Teena's girlfriends, all of whom describe him as a perfect gentleman who ingeniously hid his biological sex. There are interviews with his family, who talk about a daughter-son and sister-brother they seem to genuinely love. And there are transcripts of the police interview with Teena after he had been raped; the leering indifference of the interviewing cop is chilling, especially in retrospect.

John Lott and Tom Nissen, the two young men who raped and murdered Teena, were interviewed in jail. Even in front of the camera, neither is able to muster genuine remorse. Instead, they're defensive, sullen and seem concerned only with avoiding the penalties for their heinous crimes.

Lana Tisdell, Brandon's girlfriend up to the time of his death, is interviewed extensively. Though she comes across a bit less heroic and more human than her saintly counterpart in *Boys Don't Cry*, she recalls Teena with respect and affection.

The Brandon Teena Story offers a real-life portrait of society's still commonplace discomfort and ambivalence toward sexually "different" people. It is an essential piece of documentation, the complex reality behind a story that has taken on legendary proportions.

—*Christopher McQuain*

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

Party Magic Productions
 Presents
Dance Dance Dance
 with D.J. Lauren

A Benefit For Swan House
 A New Adult Foster Care Home Serving People With HIV/AIDS Located in Milwaukie, OR

April 22, 2000 At The Echo Theater
 8:00pm-1:00am 1515 S.E. 37th Portland

Tickets \$10 In Advance \$15 At The Door
 Tickets Available At
 It's My Pleasure + In Other Words
 This Is A Non-Smoking Non-Alcohol Event
 Refreshments Available



Lips

by Constance Congdon

February 25 - March 26

Thursday - Saturday: 8pm

Sunday Matinee: 2pm

Preview: February 25, 26, 27 & March 2

Opening Night: March 3

Mat Chat Sunday: March 5

The first female President engages in political skullduggery of a most unusual kind. Hailed by *The New Yorker* as "practically a miracle: a political satire that is funny and leaves its audience with something substantive to think about."

**All Performances
 At Theater! Theatre!**

3430 SE Belmont Ave., Portland

Reserve tickets now!

242-0080

justout

