

FILMS

CENTER STAGE

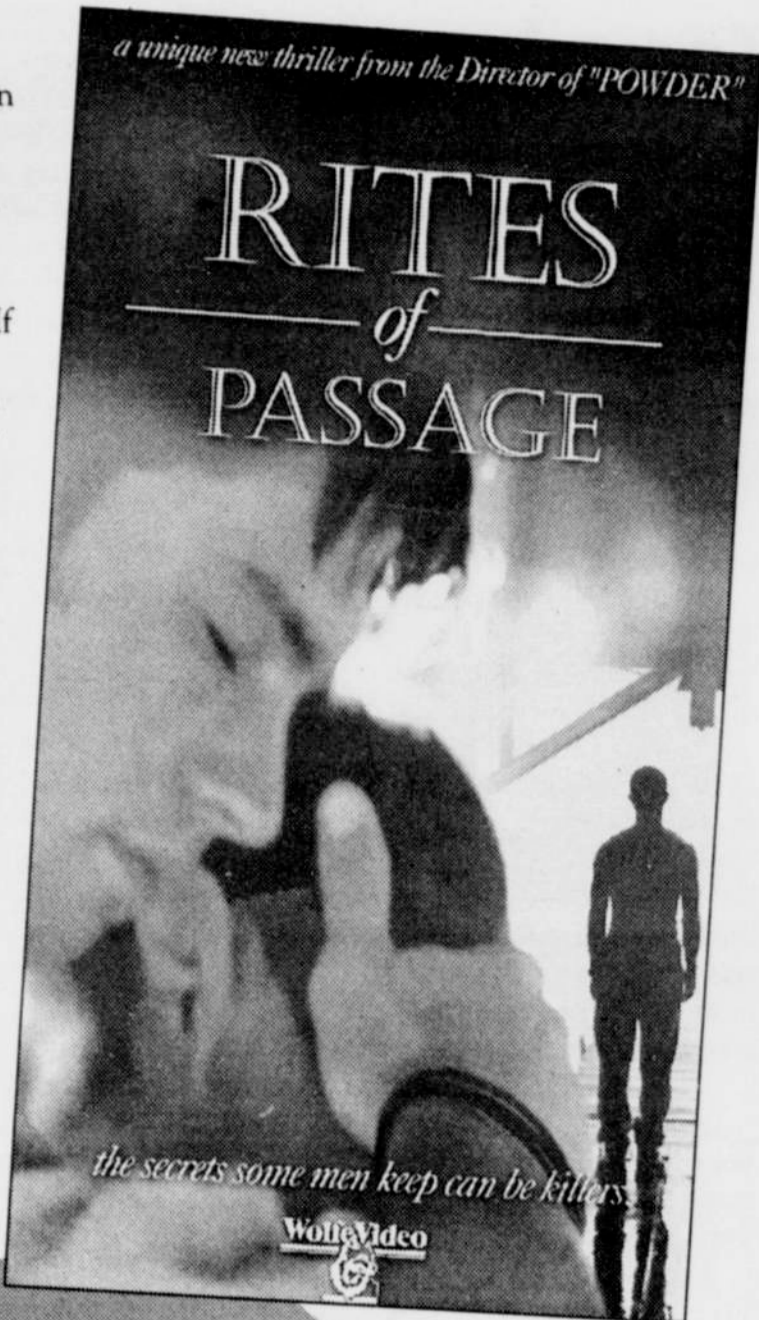
If the world needed an updated version of *Fame*, here it is, with a dash of *A Chorus Line* thrown in for good measure. *Center Stage* is a new film that follows a group of young dance students who have defied the odds to enter the prestigious American Ballet Academy. If they can survive love affairs, bulimia, badly bloodied toes and their own egos, they may even learn to help each other reach their goal: the end-of-the-season workshop that will gain them entrance to working ballet companies.

Although the teachers include film stars Peter Gallagher and Donna Murphy, the young cast of *Center Stage* is almost entirely unknown outside the ballet world. Yet, despite their on-camera inexperience, many of them acquit themselves admirably in both dance scenes and dramatics. Spotlit in the film is sexy ballet superstar Ethan Steifel playing a teacher who sleeps with his students—but only to help them reach their true potential.

Interestingly enough, with their hair pulled back into tight buns and all dressed alike, it's hard to tell the lead white-girl characters apart, so it's propitious that one of the leads is a feisty African American named Eva (Zoë Saldana) whose attitude goes against tradition. And, inevitably, one of the male dancers is gay: vivacious Erik (African American dancer Shakiem Evans), who enlivens each scene he's in.

Although predictable, *Center Stage* is an enjoyable mix of ballet and teen drama. Even without anybody dancing on taxicabs.

—Andy Mangels



Films trip

Just Out checks out a new theatrical release and a video you might want to avoid

an angry D.J. for a weekend at their lakeside cabin to "have a talk." Unexpectedly, D.J.'s younger brother, Campbell (Jason Behr), is already at the cabin and is clearly unhappy to see his family. There is tension between the three; confrontations break out.

There are flashbacks, accusations and confessions, with each fresh piece of clichéd emotional baggage furthering the film's insipidity.

After more than enough implausible emoting from our dysfunctional protagonists, the convicts from the beginning of the film turn up at the cabin, and we realize that Campbell is in cahoots with them and that the cabin is their meeting place, though he never suspected their scheme might involve his family. The story twists, turns, swerves and veers even more wildly after that, all pointless complication and needless "action."

The overly obvious themes of *Rites of Passage* are dysfunctional families and the harm that comes from an outmoded code of masculinity (one that, though certainly insidious, may no longer even be dominant). Video store shelves offer plenty of Bergman and Woody Allen dramas for acute portrayals of familial strain, and the films of Neil LaBute for scathing visions of testosterone run amok, eliminating any excuses for renting the bland, tedious piece of work that is *Rites of Passage*.

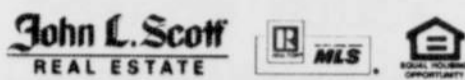
—Christopher McQuain

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