

Although the weather outside hasn't been too frightful, it's still the season for curling up with books and videos on a winter night. So dish up some popcorn, kindle a fire and enjoy these suggestions for an evening's entertainment.

I'VE HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING

Before Canadian director Patricia Rozema made the lesbian film favorite *When Night Is Falling*, she put together a treat of a flick in *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*. The then 29-year-old lesbian won the Young Cinema Award in 1987 at Cannes for this fantastical tale about a rather clumsy young woman who is talented with a camera but low on self-esteem.

Polly wanders aimlessly through life and a succession of temp jobs before landing a permanent part-time gig at a small, trendy art gallery run by Gabrielle St. Peres, whose poise and sophistication equal her name. Polly is enamored with Gabrielle's perfection, particularly in light of her own awkward reality.

"She was like a fairy tale," Polly narrates. "She went to school all over the world and talked to



Polly wants a girlfriend

the kind of people who write books."

Eventually, Polly realizes she has feelings that are difficult to identify: "I think I kind of fell in love with the curator. I know that love is a pretty strong word when you're talking about another woman, and she's not your mother, but there you go."

Polly becomes intent on helping the resistant Gabrielle display her own work in the gallery. This, together with the arrival of Gabrielle's young ex-girlfriend, leads to trouble.

Sheila McCarthy is an absolute joy as Polly with her unexpressive, gray clothing and a rumpled carrot top of a head, which gives way to a perpetually puzzled expression. The film weaves in images of Polly's fantasy life (in which she can fly and say frightfully intelligent things) as well as shots of her narrating the story in front of a video camera. Careful editing keeps this from becoming confusing.

Fantasy, story and film reality blend effortlessly. As an added bonus, Gabrielle's ex dons some great '80s clothes. —Lisa Bradshaw

Whiling away an evening

An assortment of amusements with women in mind



FIRE

Fire is the first in Deepa Mehta's trilogy of elemental films, followed by *Earth* in 1998 and *Water*, slated for release later this year. The Indian-born director, who immigrated to Canada in the '70s, says passion is the connecting theme in all three.

Fire takes place in modern-day New Delhi, where Sita, a young and beautiful bride, enters the home of her new husband, Jatin. He was coerced into getting married by his older brother, Ashok, with whom he lives in a traditional "joint" family—sharing a home and all income generated



from the family's video rental and takedown business.

The brothers are in constant disagreement about their living arrangement and about Jatin's continued love affair with his Chinese girlfriend, who refused to marry him. Meanwhile, Sita gets busy learning the family business and helping Ashok's wife of 13 years, Radha, maintain the household.

Both Sita and Radha essentially have been abandoned by their husbands: Jatin takes no real interest in Sita, and Ashok

has made a vow to resist desire, brought on by Radha's inability to bear children. Sita and Radha soon discover a surprising—but appealing and liberating—attraction to each other.

The movie has its problems. It's filmed in English, which is Mehta's first language, but that detracts from authenticity. And Sita is a bit of a stereotype. She waltzes into the house, defying convention from the very first hour of her arrival, and pursues a relationship with Radha rather effortlessly, as if she falls in love with her husband's traditional Indian sister-in-law every day.

Mehta's metaphorical references, however, and the absolutely flawless performance of Shabana Azmi as Radha save the day. She carries this movie and is a commanding screen presence. Watching Radha discover her own desires and needs and come to the realization that she has a right to them is in itself worth viewing the film.

Fire derives its name from the trial by fire of Hindu mythology. A pure wife will survive the flames unscathed, which Radha ultimately has to do in order to escape her suffocating life.

The visual reference of the trial by fire is a heart-stopping climax, and the final scene is breathtakingly moody and sensual. As a woman who left a husband to jump into the unknown with a foreign girlfriend, I have a hard time not loving this film. —LB

SOMETHING BETTER SOON Maureen Kelly • Meaux Records

The first thing I notice about Maureen Kelly's CD *Something Better Soon* is the strength and tear-at-your-heartstrings quality of her voice. She has that great combination of clarity and pain of all raw, honest folk and country singers. At times she reminds me of an early Kris Williamson. Although her lyrics are not particularly "out," her homage to love, "Swept Away," certainly feels woman-identified.

Kelly writes her own music and lyrics, and like any passionate country singer/songwriter, she embraces topics that are painful snapshots of the human experience. For instance, "Lonely Town USA" is about a plant closing and how it affects the residents.

But this CD mostly is about love: having it, losing it and finding it again.

Kelly sings, "Even brokenhearted, come to find I can't leave love."

She cites Aretha Franklin, Roy Orbison, Joe Cocker, Janice Joplin, Patsy Cline and Melissa Etheridge as her musical influences. This is evident in her no-holds-barred vocal style.

Although her CD has an overabundance of midi track backup, Kelly's voice is able to transcend the patently canned sound of the drums. She does incorporate acoustic and electric guitars; however, I would love for her to record with a live band. If she can do this much with what amounts to basically a band in a box, there's no telling where she could go with a live sound.

Kelly is Portland-based, although she originally hails from Wyoming. She has performed throughout the United States and toured extensively in Canada. She recently joined forces with two Portland favorites, Donna Luckert and Barb Galloway.

This nine-song CD and Kelly's earlier work *Yesterday's Child* are available from www.meauxrecords.com or by writing to P.O. Box 230685, Portland, OR 97218. If you would like to be notified of upcoming concerts and events, you can be added to the mailing list by sending an e-mail to Maureen@meauxrecords.com. —Lynn Thomas

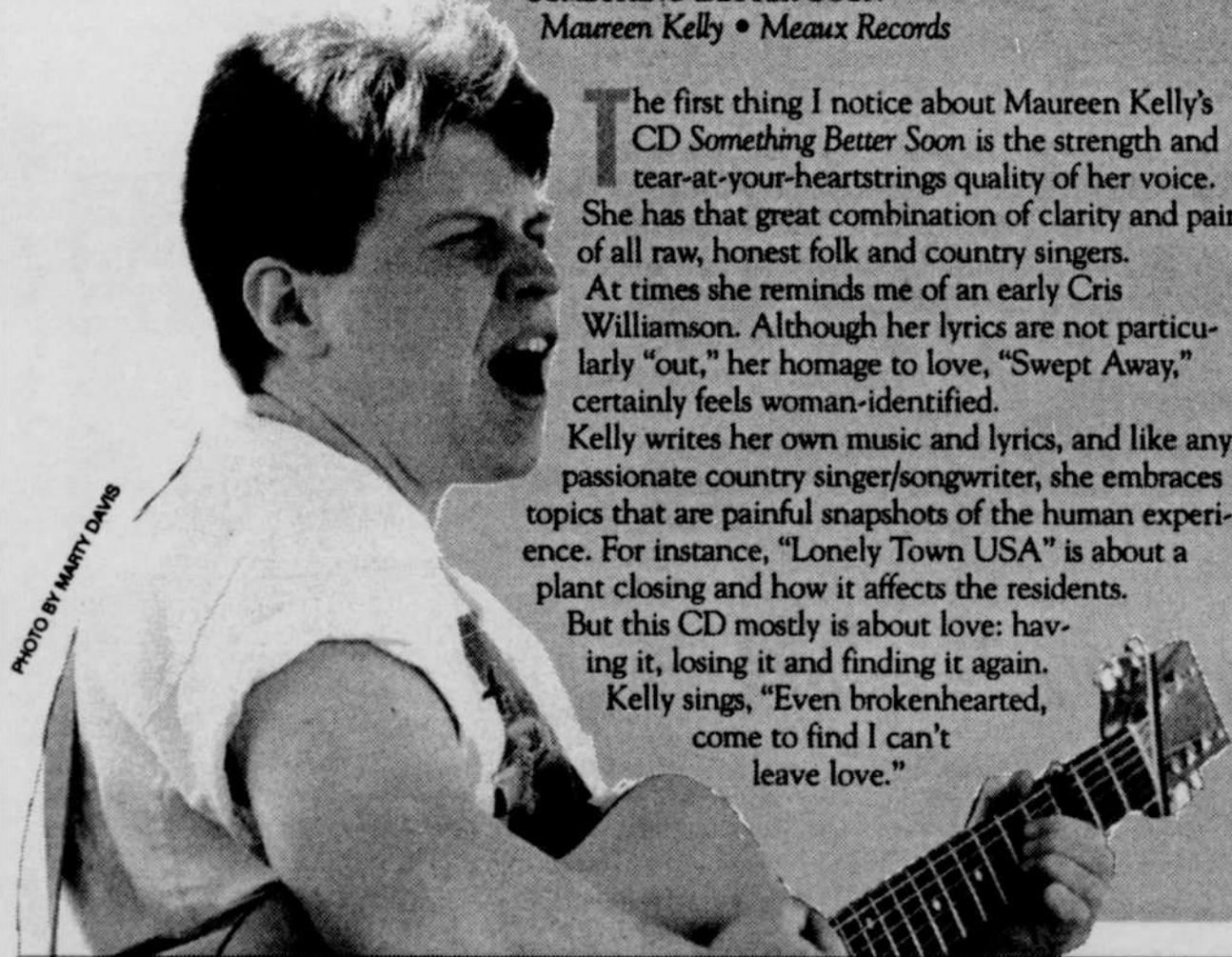


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