

FILM

DIE, MOMMIE, DIE
Dec. 5 to 11, Cinema 21

A forgotten, aging singing sensation (screenwriter Charles Busch, in drag) plots a comeback and becomes a murderess while repressing shocking secrets and attempting to cope with an oppressive movie-producer husband (Philip Baker Hall), a suave gigolo lover (Jason Priestley, doing an excellent William Shatner impression), a meddling, Bible-thumping maid (Frances Conroy of *Six Feet Under*), a prissy daughter (the always game Natasha Lyonne) and an Easy Rider-wannabe gay son (Stark Sands).

So goes *Die, Mommie, Die*, a film that seems to promise gaudy hilarity but slips into lazy over-reliance upon a cultural currency that's rapidly going extinct. The film studiously evokes the strange iconography of a certain moment in our cultural history—a time that saw the odd intersection of the then mostly closeted queer community and a rapidly shifting Hollywood star hierarchy.

Camp films recalled by *Die, Mommie, Die*—second-string '60s "thrillers" like *Dead Ringer* and *Strait-Jacket*, respectively starring established gay icons Bette Davis and Joan Crawford—held a certain appeal to a gay audience that knew from painful personal experience the tension between glamorous dreams and cruel reality.

Fortunately for us, but unfortunately for *Die, Mommie, Die*'s central conceit, that moment is something of memory (for gay baby boomers and seniors) or history (for subsequent, post-gay-lib generations).

This puts *Die, Mommie, Die* and its audience into a peculiar and finally untenable position. Like Todd Haynes' *Far from Heaven* and Peyton Reed's *Down with Love*, director Mark Rucker,

Prey for better movies

Double meaning of "drag" made evident in new queer releases

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN



Charles Busch (right) leads a talented cast in the ultimately disappointing *Die, Mommie, Die*

Busch and their designers have striven, with an impressive degree of success, for verisimilitude. However, where those two films had clear-cut, confident senses of purpose, *Die, Mommie, Die*'s mimicry stumbles into aimless faltering; it doesn't go far enough beyond merely accurate, decorative imitation to avoid reminding us that, in between their "good" parts, the movies it references were full of patches that were simply flat, B-grade filmmaking.

The cast is worth seeing. Busch, in particular, earns generous laughter with his minutely detailed expressions and physicality. But the film's indecisiveness (or neglect, or myopia) regarding its own identity finally renders it an interesting, intermittently funny failure.

PREY FOR ROCK & ROLL
Dec. 12 to 18, Hollywood Theatre

To say *Prey for Rock & Roll* bites off more than it can chew is putting it nicely. Audience members who've bought the film's billing as a story about rock 'n' roll women featuring real women playing

real rock, told with insight and integrity, may even consider it a sellout.

The characters themselves—strung-out Tracy (Drea de Matteo) on bass, lead guitarist Faith (Lori Petty), drummer Stacy (Shelly Cole) and tough, bisexual, middle-aged, rock-goddess singer Jacki (Gina Gershon), together comprising a band called Clam Dandy—are not without interest and potential.

Unfortunately, Cheri Lovedog and Robin

Whitehouse's script bogs them down in uninspired, bluntly executed subplots involving bad boyfriends, midlife crises and predatory music-biz types before recklessly going over not one but two contrived narrative cliffs. By the end, the movie has crashed and burned before our very eyes, and not before coming regrettably close to trivializing some rather serious issues with its patronizing, phony Lifetime Channelisms.

Gershon herself sings—it's neither terrible nor unique. The group sounds like a decent bar band, but the music isn't special enough for the music-video-length exposure it's given. More worthy L.A. female-rock soundtrack material—L7, say—would've better captured the milieu and gone further toward convincing us that Clam Dandy are unfairly overlooked and undervalued by the industry.

It doesn't help that director Alex Steyermark constructs flat, merely competent sequences or that he seems not to have encouraged the actors to shape their performances. Cole and de Matteo fare well enough, but Petty is stuck doing a not-great Ellen DeGeneres impression. (The lesbian relationship between her and Cole, like most relationships in the film, doesn't leave much of an impression.)

Gershon, all charisma and sex appeal, is more of a "presence" than an actor. Her performance and voice-over narration are full of attitude, but it's dress-up rock-star attitude—it comes across as too affected and predictable for the supposedly bullshit-proof Jacki.

Which is, revealingly, the same discrepancy that causes the film itself to fail: It refuses to walk its no-BS rock 'n' roll talk. **JM**

CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Seattle free-lance writer.

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