

FILM

REVIEWS

GYPSY 83
June 25 to July 1,
Hollywood Theatre

We're all familiar with Goth, the subculture of pale-complexioned, raven-haired, self-consciously doomy nonconformists whose disappointment at life's unfairness is brazenly worn upon their sleeves.

This disenfranchised-friendly but terminally self-serious sensibility begs—nay, demands—our pity, and it's an easy target; there's been a Goth sketch on *Saturday*

Night Live and a rather mean but very funny and surprisingly knowledgeable Goth-mocking *South Park* episode. To un-Gothly paraphrase Kermit the Frog, it's not easy being Goth.

With friends like *Gypsy 83*, however, the Goths don't need any enemies. Written and directed by Todd Stephens (*Edge of Seventeen*), it relates the misadventures of 20-something Gypsy and her queer high school senior friend, Clive.

Gypsy's Stevie Nicks fixation—including a penchant for shawls, witchy gowns and lots and lots of twirling—and her friend's black-clad, lipsticked gayness do not help them fit into Sandusky, Ohio, where A-student Clive lives with his befuddled family, and Gypsy forlornly sings the songs of her deceased mother with her dad, a washed-up musician.

The pair spontaneously head to New York, where Gypsy will participate in the Night of 1000 Stevies, a drag/lip-sync parade of unhealthy obsession. (There is, glaringly, a total absence from the film of any actual Stevie Nicks music.)

On their eventful road trip, they meet a seductive lounge singer at a karaoke bar, Gypsy has a tempestuous affair with a wayward Amish hunk (who's subjected to a sort of *Goth Eye for the Amish Guy* makeover), and Clive loses his virginity to a duplicitous, self-deluded frat boy.

There is soapy, door-slamming, tantrum-throwing self-discovery. There are grandstanding rants wherein Gypsy and/or Clive telegraph the banal theories of the screenwriter. It all leads up to a forgettable, bittersweet ending, complete with tacky slow motion.

Sara Rue (from TV's *Less Than Perfect*) and Kett Turton are good actors, but they're jerked around by Stephens like marionettes at the hands of an evil puppeteer. Even the few well-conceived scenes, including Clive's rejection by snobbish NYC Goths, are constructed and shot in a manner ranging from unimaginative to just poor. Stephens' script lacks any perspective or control and seems to suffer from Tourette's syndrome; everything in it feels blurted out for no apparent reason.

Is a movie about the emotional and sexual coming of age of a gay Goth and his motherless female buddy a worthwhile proposition? I think it is. But having it made by people who evidently believe that throwing in some fine music by Siouxsie and the Banshees and *The Cure* is all it takes should tremendously displease the target queer/Goth audience, for whom *Gypsy 83* will be like having their life stories reduced to a trashy, dignity-robbing movie of the week.



Director Todd Stephens' love letter to Goth is pure spam

THE 4TH MAN
June 19, Whitsell Auditorium

The *4th Man*, the last Dutch-language film directed by the (in)famous Paul Verhoeven before he went Hollywood with *Showgirls* and *Starship Troopers*, presents us with a love triangle involving two men, one woman and no insurmountable gender-based inhibitions.

It probably seemed daring for its day (1983), and, unlike Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct*, which was boycotted by some groups in 1991 because of its psycho, murderous queer females, *The 4th Man* (which plays as part of the Northwest Film Center's *The Human Dutch* series) seems to have been viewed as benign or even queer-positive.

What's missing from Verhoeven's early exercise in gaudiness, however, isn't a thoughtful or cogent take on sexual orientation or gender politics, which the film makes no pretense of offering, but the sort of fine-tuned, winking, shamelessly cinephilic sensibility that better directors like Brian De Palma have parlayed into the stylish art of Cinema as Dirty Joke.

Verhoeven's European work tends to be more highly regarded than his big-budget camp epics, but there is no discernible difference between the slick, '80s-vintage TV-commercial feel of *The 4th Man* and that of, say, *Flashdance*, also released in '83. Instead of the glossily photographed, technically skilled and almost surrealistically cheesy depiction of a working-class woman who becomes a ballerina via dancing in bars, Verhoeven gives us the glossily photographed, technically skilled and almost surrealistically cheesy depiction of a disheveled yet overconfident gay writer who gets involved with a seductive female fan, then finds himself caught in a boiling cauldron of polysexual erotic intrigue that might just be the death of him.

There is a constant barrage of hilarious, literal-minded visual symbolism, including spiders spinning webs (like a dangerous temptress luring her prey—get it?) and more inexplicably portentous Catholic imagery than a Madonna video.

The tone is light enough to tip us off that Verhoeven doesn't take most of this very unserious stuff any more seriously than he should. Nonetheless, instead of the self-awareness and relish for the movie's underlying tawdriness that might've made it sensational, we get an unsatisfying bag of tricks, and *The 4th Man* meets the fate of so many proficient but mediocre films: It's not much more than a commercial for itself.

—Christopher McQuain

—CM

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