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Sound like a Chinese reality TV show? Or perhaps a Chinese variation of Japan's crazy family genre à la Takashi Miike's *Visitor Q*? In fact, this is a well-acted, if not always convincing, indie feature in the fairly recent "urban quasi-assimilated quirky Chinese-American family comedy/drama" genre. Director Georgia Lee takes a respectful, quietly comic approach to what in another filmmaker's hands might be treated as wild melodrama. After all, Katie does deliver bags of shit to her nemesis, and Julie does have a mad make-out session with her hot new gal pal while Mom watches. Shouldn't such scenes be played for high drama?

But Lee resists this impulse throughout, opting instead for a careful fleshing-out of the characters and their dilemmas. Her obvious affection for them is contagious, and even reluctant audiences might find themselves hoping that Samantha will dump her yuppie boyfriend; Julie will stop questioning Angelina's motives and start fucking her brains out (their scenes are pretty hot); and Katie will stop with the bags of burning dog shit already. Maybe Mom will refrain from using food as a panacea and Dad will even consider getting a new hobby besides trying to kill himself.



Time to Leave

This is Lee's debut feature, and despite some tedious stretches and clichés, it's a well-done soap opera that draws you in unawares. Expect to see more of her work in the future. **B+**

—GM

Time to Leave's protagonist to be: Romain (Melvil Poupaud) is a fashion photographer—like Ozon, a successful, modern gay man working in the world of glamorous images. Regardless, it's clear that the director's mind is on mortality: The bulk of the film follows Romain, who is in his late 20s, through the final months of his life. As driven, self-absorbed and unlikable as the worst fashion-biz stereotype, Romain is spitefully competitive, loathes children (including his own niece and nephew) and puts up a front of dispassion for his partner, Sasha

(the beautifully androgynous Christian Sengewald), whom he in fact loves.

Romain is therefore no saint, so when his terminal illness (cancer, not AIDS, as he fears) is discovered, Ozon has no obligation to present us with a martyr. Instead, we get a serenely measured yet engaging look at what a fairly average (which is to say rather flawed) person might go through were he to discover that his young, promising life is to be cut short. Sometimes poignant, sometimes funny and almost always resonant, Romain's journey encompasses some riveting characters, including a waitress (5x2's Valeria Tedeschi) who proffers a hilariously awkward proposition and Romain's grandmother (the legendary Jeanne Moreau), the one person in his life for whom he has unfettered affection.

Time to Leave is mercifully free of proselytizing or moralizing about life and death. If it has a flaw, it is its infrequent lapses into sentimentality, which, by seeming so out of place, actually point up the fine psychological and emotional rigor of the rest of the film; Ozon has made a contemplation, not a statement. Although it will likely stand as a minor



Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing

TIME TO LEAVE

9 p.m. Oct. 10

One of the most interesting figures in contemporary queer cinema (or any cinema, for that matter), French director François Ozon makes films in two distinct categories: the cool, sober, investigatory arthouse stare-down (2000's *Under the Sand*, 2004's *5x2*) and the florid, whip-smart, campy extravaganza (2000's *Water Drops on Burning Rocks*, 2002's *8 Women*). His latest, *Time to Leave*—purportedly the second installation in a trilogy that began with *Under the Sand*—falls decidedly under the former description.

It's debatable how autobiographical Ozon intends

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