

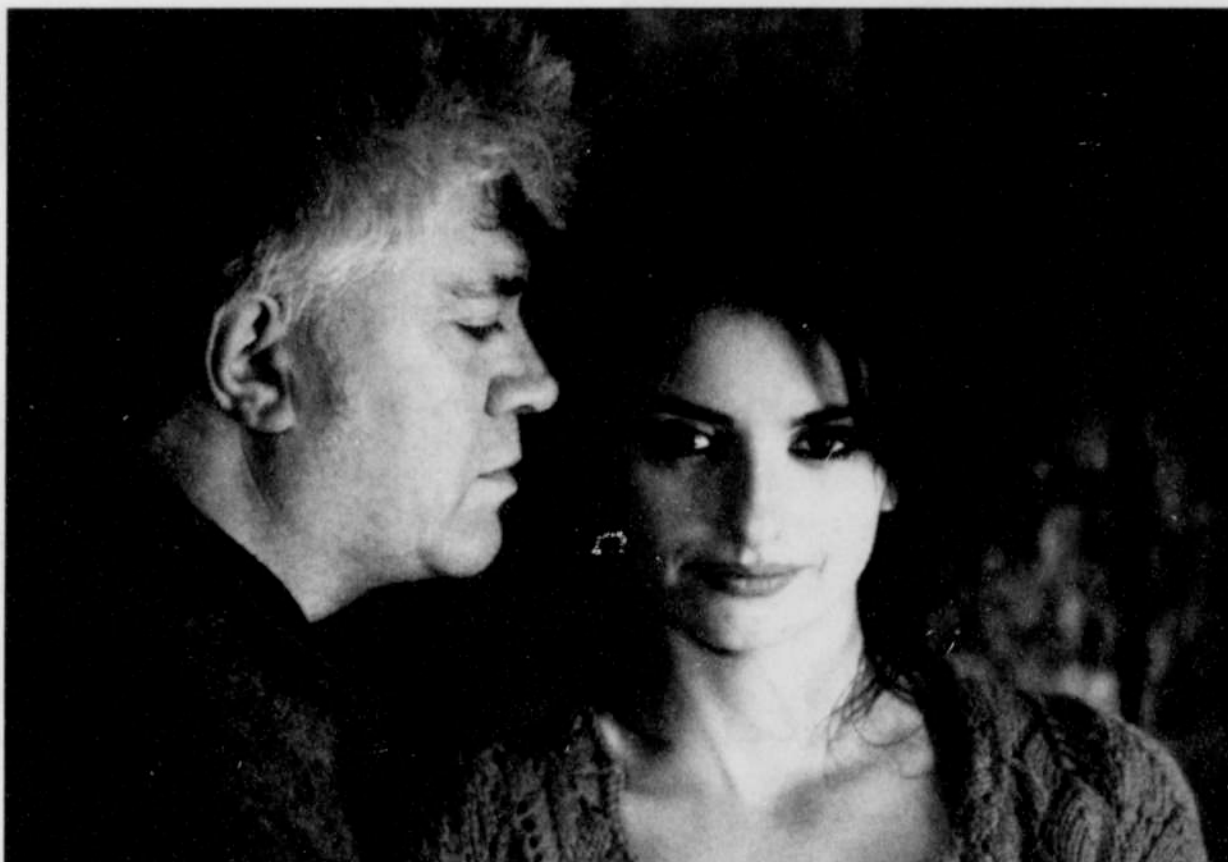
film

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lusciously melodramatic "women's picture" mode (*The Flower of My Secret* and *Talk to Her*), you're in for a spectacular treat. In any case, the Spanish auteur's touch is so sure by now, one goes to any new film of his confidently expecting a certain singularly vivacious brilliance, and *Volver* doesn't disappoint.

Penélope Cruz returns the favor Almodóvar granted her when he basically launched her international career with 1997's *Live Flesh* (as well as giving her a plum role in 1999's *All About My Mother*): She is the pillar of *Volver*'s several story lines and ensemble female cast, and she gives a remarkable performance as Raimunda, a strong, life-loving woman who happens to be stuck in a dirty kitchen sink of a marriage. When her husband turns out to be even worse than she thought, events take a turn that leave her and her daughter struggling to get by. Meanwhile, the rest of the female members of Raimunda's family (including Almodóvar stalwart Carmen Maura in a most unusual maternal role) learn that they didn't know one another as well as they thought, and the revelation of some buried secrets, along with their sheer need for one another's support, leads them to buoy each other up through their conflicts and struggles, both with one another and in their respective lives.

Opening Dec. 22 at Cinema 21, *Volver* is possessed of the same assurance that Almodóvar brought to 2004's *Bad Education*; it's a beautifully made, virtually flawless film without a drop of sweat on it. It is far less specifically queer in content than was *Bad Education*, but the "women's picture," as



Queer director Pedro Almodóvar reunites with actress Penélope Cruz with *Volver*.

any gay cinephile will assure you, is a queer tradition unto itself, with a queer coterie including George Cukor, Rock Hudson, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, John Waters and (more recently) Todd Haynes and Almodóvar all having had their enamored flirtations with the genre. This kind of film at its best is deceptively sumptuous, enticing the viewer into an artificial, heightened, hyper-dramatic world that is nevertheless far from escapist, with devastating emotional realities at its

core. Colorful, warm, funny, yet ultimately immensely moving, *Volver* is a both an eminently worthy example of the genre and yet another jewel in Almodóvar's already dazzling oeuvre. **A**

—Christopher McQuinn

We Are Marshall

Director McG (*Charlie's Angels*) delivers a heartfelt, emotional and inspirational movie based on the true story of a 1970 plane crash that killed

the whole Marshall University football team on a flight home to Huntington, W.Va., and how the aftermath affects a small town. Some people thought the university should start up a new football team, while others believed it would be too painful and a constant reminder of the tragedy. When the school finds a new head coach (Matthew McConaughey), he gathers players who, for the love of the game, honor the memory of the dead team. I'm not a football fan, but this movie kept my attention. Don't forget to bring tissues! Opens Dec. 22. **A-**

—YPB

Wondrous Oblivion

Take *Billy Elliot*, remove the economic tension, replace it with racial tension, and you've got this charming but not highly original feel-good film about two families in a silent struggle for social acceptance from their working-class South London neighbors in the 1960s. Eleven-year-old David Wiseman is obsessed with cricket yet plays it poorly. His father, a Jewish accent-heavy

workaholic, and his young, beautiful mother do their best to raise their small family. Dennis Samuels (well played by Delroy Lindo) and his Jamaican family move in next door, where he erects a cricket net and is quick to take David under his wing. The Wiseman family is suddenly faced with losing the shred of decency their bigoted neighbors have shown them till now. Opens Dec. 15 at Hollywood Theatre. **B-**

—Malka Geffen 10

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