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film

The Country Teacher

Director Bohdan Sláma made a splash on the film festival circuit with two films, 2001's *The Wild Bees* and 2005's award-winning *Something Like Happiness*, both set in the same kind of Eastern European rural village milieu as *The Country Teacher*. His new film introduces a queer theme to the setting, with ultimately satisfying results.

A young schoolteacher from Prague inexplicably heads for the hinterlands, a remote Czech village, to teach science to the rubes. Even the principal of the school can't understand why Peter would bother with them. But Peter has a good reason for his disappearing act: He's a tortured closet case leaving a failed relationship. The country, he thinks, will give him both grounding and anonymity.

However, the locals start making inroads immediately into Peter's emotional repressions, trying to get this dour character to laugh, relax and open up. He meets a middle-aged, salt-of-the-earth woman named Marie, who herds cows, and her sexy teenage son, Lada. The trio form a complicated friendship, and no wonder—in some ways they're the same person, each driven by an unrequited love. Marie falls for Peter, Peter falls for Lada, and Lada falls for a "city girl" who vanishes back to Prague with Peter's bisexual ex-lover.

The first rattlings of Peter's closet door come when his ex-lover appears trying to lure him back. Then when a drunken Lada nearly drowns, Peter's rescue efforts turn into an ill-considered seduction. Acting on his feelings for Lada threatens to destroy the three-way friendship and perhaps Peter along with it.

This quietly powerful, naturalistic drama vividly evokes the pleasures and privations of village life, from telling conversations in haystacks and deep wells to raucous scenes in makeshift bars where the locals drown their sorrows in drink. *The Country Teacher*, which ends on a surprising note, incorporates its gay theme into a larger picture of the complexities of love and longing, giving it a resonance beyond the profusion of contemporary queer indies aimed only at gay audiences.

Screens 2:30 p.m. Feb. 7 and 9 p.m. Feb. 9 at Broadway Metroplex during the 32nd Portland International Film Festival. For details visit www.nwfilm.org. **A**

—Gary Morris

He's Just Not That into You

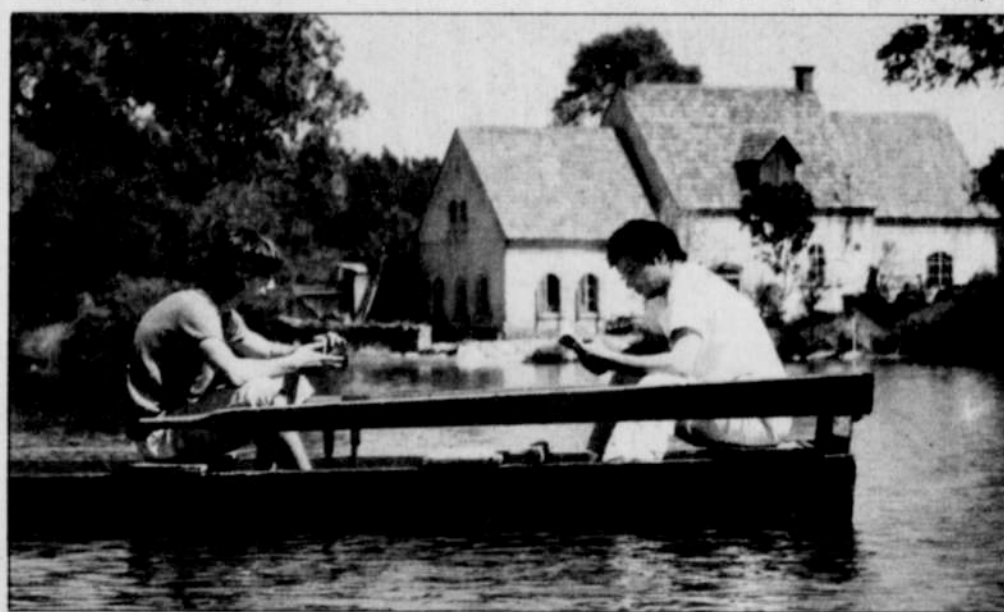
Not since *The Devil Wears Prada* or *Mean Girls* has there been such a delicious confection of commercial entertainment. Based on the nonfiction title of the same name, this romantic comedy follows a series of interconnected narratives about adorably appealing people as they navigate the pitfalls and humiliations of relationships in an age where you can get rejected by seven different technologies. The token gay characters are one-dimensional, but the rest of the script, although a tad long, is funny, smart and ultimately thought-provoking. **B+**

—Floyd Sklaver

The Lady Who Swallowed a Fly

Portland queer filmmaker Byrd McDonald, who produced the recent cult fave *The Auteur*, takes us into the meandering mind of a possibly insane mother in this beautifully shot, 12-minute exer-

cise in dementia. Mom, driving her two kids all around Portland, The Dalles and gloomy Maupin, tries to order some fast food, but the speaker's broken. The radio doesn't work. The cell phone doesn't work. She discovers a little girl seemingly murdered on a



A tortured closet case heads for the hinterlands to escape a failed relationship in *The Country Teacher*.

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