

The Arts

“Country” tribute to farm spirit Captures devotion to land

By D. Dietrich
Of The Print

To say that “Country” starring Jessica Lange and Sam Shepard is another save the farm film is to sell it drastically short. Indeed the new release playing at the Eastgate theater is set in the uniquely rural farmland of Iowa where the men are men and the women are in the kitchen. But the film soon becomes the study of human devotion and the historical decline of family farming in America.

Written and co-produced by William D. Wiltfiff, who also wrote Raggedy Man, the film follows the foreclosure of a farm in a small community and brings to life the effects of big business in the farming industry. The primary conflict is between the government loan officer's, “It's a business,” attitude and the farmer's “It's a way of life,” concept. But when it comes to power, the government has it and prefers to keep these families as numbers on a data sheet.

Lange and Shepard play Jewell and Gilbert Ivy whose farm has been in Jewell's family for years and is actually a prime piece of land. In spite of that the rising costs of supplies combined with a few bad years of weather has placed the Ivy's on a kind of a black list with the Farmer's Home Administration whose job is to oversee the farming loans. When Shepard tries

to find out why his checks are being garnished he is told by the stereotypically evil government loan officer that it is simply until a review of his loan is completed. What they neglect to tell Shepard is that they have already decided to “work toward a voluntary liquidation.”

Within a few days the Ivy's find themselves among other neighbors ridiculously required to pay originally long-term loans within thirty days. The premise is part of American history and the film takes the liberty of examining the desperation felt by families faced with such an impossible demand. This farming couple and their two children, Carlisle (Levi L. Knebel) and Marleen (Theresa Graham), along with Lange's father (Wilford Brimley) go through a series of self realizations in order to work through what is easily the hardest times of their lives.

Shepard is the first to lose control and turns to the bottle for an escape. Fortunately for Lange his escape isn't as drastic as that of their neighbor whose retarded son has been taken away by the state along with all of his land and livestock. Lange is called over to the neighbors by the wife who says her husband has holed himself up in the barn and she can't bring herself to go in. What Lange sees when she enters the barn is a truly broken man and the off-screen gunshot is surely one of the most deeply felt in screen history.

Lange loses the support of her husband and

finds herself fighting the system the only way she can, with the voice of the community behind her. Her struggle is reminiscent of Norma Rae in a selfless effort to fight for what she believes in. Her performance is one of control and subtleties creating a simple intensity that won't allow the viewer to look away.

The most important aspect in the direction of this movie is the respect the camera seems to have for the characters. We don't see their emotions splashed over the twenty-foot screen but instead we sense it through cracks in doors and sideway glances. It would seem disrespectful to do otherwise because the movie feels like a documentary taking care not to offend.

The movie doesn't end in a happily-ever-after style. There is still a struggle left for the family to overcome but they have found the strength to fight it at least and there is now hope. The ending does give some satisfaction with a short statement of the legislation passed last February to stop the foreclosure of similar farms. One wonders if it is coincidence that such legislation happened to be passed while this film was being made.

Not to be seen for a light evening, “Country” is to be seen for beautiful scenery, top performances by the entire cast and a fitting musical score carried out primarily by George Winston's caressing piano solos. Not only is this movie of human character but of American history and a slice of culture rapidly being forced into extinction.



REHEARSING FOR THEIR one-act play, *The Good Doctor*, Chris Parrish and Marty Yost perfect their form as Parrish pulls out a tooth.

Photo by Joel Miller

IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP!!

THE ARTIST IN YOU IS EMERGING!!

Are you one or more of these things?

Writer...Poet...Photographer
Artist...Philosopher

If you are one or more of these things, then this is news for you! Rhapsody, the art and literary magazine of Clackamas Community College, wants your fiction, poetry, essays, photography, drawings, paintings, and anything else artistic for publication in the Fall/Winter issue. This is your opportunity to share your creativity with the world. Heck, if you have a twenty-foot sculpture we will take a picture of it or squeeze it onto our pages by some other means. We want your stuff!

Yes! You are very interested...I can tell. So I am going to tell you exactly what to do. Send all correspondence to **Rhapsody Magazine**, Clackamas Community College, 19600 S. Molalla Ave., Oregon City, Oregon 97045. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of your materials. Or bring your submissions to Trailer B on campus. Feel free to call us at 657-8400, ext. 309. We are looking forward to your contribution.

Thanks ever so much,
Michael Jarmer
Rhapsody Editor

