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Photo credit: Daniel Dulac on the mixed climb Musashi, Banff National Park. © Sara Rainbird (www.sararainbird.com)

Friday Screening

Weekend Warrior.....culture/humor

Chasing the White Demon.....rafting/kayaking

Alone Across Australia.....solo trekking

The Collective.....mt. biking

Russian Wave.....culture/kayaking

Soul Purpose.....snowboarding

Balance of Risk.....climbing

Saturday Screening

Psicobloc.....climbing

Heavy Fork.....free riding/humor

Daughters of Everest.....mountaineering

One World.....kayaking

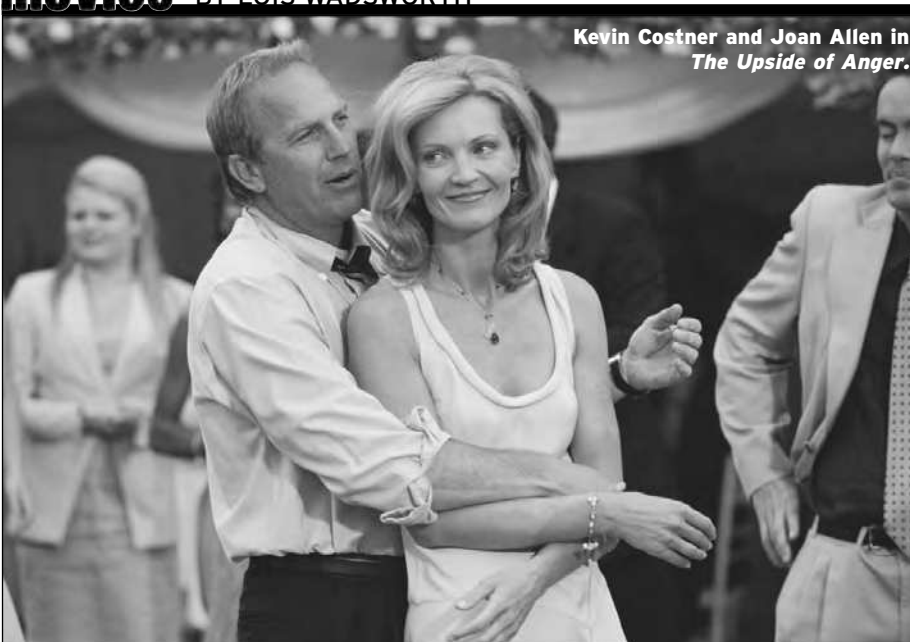
The ManWho Jumped.....base jumping

Yukon Quest.....sport/environment

Sinners.....skiing

movies

BY LOIS WADSWORTH



Kevin Costner and Joan Allen in *The Upside of Anger*.

Clumsy Attempt

Too much sitcom, too little depth

THE UPSIDE OF ANGER: Written and directed by Mike Bender. Produced by Alex Gartner, Jack Binder, Sammy Lee. Cinematographer, Richard Greatrex. Production design, Chris Roope. Editors, Steve Edwards, Robin Sales. Costumes, Deborah Scott. Music, Alexandre Desplat. Starring Joan Allen and Kevin Costner. With Erika Christensen, Evan Rachel Wood, Keri Russell and Alicia Witt. Also, Mike Binder, Dane Christensen. New Line Cinema, 2005. R. 116 minutes.

At first I couldn't shake the sense that I had seen *Upside of Anger* before. Finally, I realized I was thinking about *The Virgin Suicides* (2000), Sofia Coppola's first film, based on a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. The story of an overly protective family with five daughters unfolds in flashbacks recalled 30 years later. Overprotected and infantilized by their parents, the girls finally break free after the eldest (Kirsten Dunst) has sex with a football player (Josh Hartnett). But she would rather die than tell her parents, so she takes her own life. Long before the suicides begin, a nebulous, grief-like feeling shrouds the film. The mood was pervasive, mysterious, yet strong enough to keep me emotionally distanced. I finally understood it was the narrator's nostalgia for his own innocent youth.

Something very like that indefinable mood interfered with my appreciation of *The Upside of Anger*, despite beautiful, nuanced performances by Kevin Costner and Joan Allen. Costner is Denny, a laid-back former baseball player with a penchant for beer and an emotionally open side that's engaging. Allen is Terry, the mother of four daughters whose husband has just disappeared. She's mad as hell but brittle, strung too tight and explosive. Unaccustomed to expressing her anger openly and missing the person the rage is intended for, Terry slumps into depression, drinks too much and embarrasses her girls and herself repeatedly on social occasions.

The atmosphere created by writer, director Mike Bender (HBO's "The Mind of the Married Man") is a twitchy strain of damped-down anger. Bender plays Shep, Denny's radio producer. Shep's an unappealing, middle-aged womanizer who sets his sights on Terry's 18-year-old daughter Andy (Erika Christensen), which draws Terry's finest fiery moments.

The relationship between Denny and Terry gives the film its anchor, and watching these two fall into bed and then into habit while drinking way too much is alternately wonderful and wretched. Alcohol-fueled ro-

mance is doomed, sooner or later, and the viewer knows things can't go on as they are. But writer, director Bender seems unable to rescue these well-drawn, fully fleshed characters from their own worst instincts.

The film's flaws are the four girls, who barely registered as individuals to me. When I looked at the names of the girls and the actresses who played them, I was certain only about Evan Rachel Wood (*Thirteen*, "Once and Again"), who plays the narrator and budding filmmaker, Popeye, and is an accomplished actor. I recognized Keri Russell, who plays the ballet dancer, Emily, as the star of "Felicity," which I watched in its first season. While Christensen acquits herself nicely as Andy, the role itself is so shallow, her talent is wasted. The least credible character is the oldest sister, Hadley (Alicia Witt), about whom we are told much but shown next to nothing.

"COMEDIC DRAMA" IS A MISBEGOTTEN TERM MASKING

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING."

Bender's checkered experience writing for television does not serve him well with the minor characters. They're sitcom daughters rather than members of a family. Bender needs to sit at a dinner table with four teenage girls and observe how they relate to one another and to their parents. He could learn a lot from Ang Lee's brilliant *The Ice Storm* (1997), where 1973 teens played by Christina Ricci, Tobey Maguire, Adam Hann-Byrd and Elijah Wood perfectly capture sibling relationships, teen angst, sexual curiosity and inexperience, and the secret life kids lead away from home and parents.

OK, that's asking a lot. Here's hoping Bender reaches that level of filmmaking someday, and he may if he figures out the story. "Comedic drama" is a misbegotten term masking "I don't know what I'm doing." *The Upside of Anger* is now playing at Cinemark and Cinema World. Highly recommended for the fine principal performances.

EW