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presents

**Lend Me
a Tenor**

*A Farce by Ken Ludwig;
Directed by Chris Pinto*

**Oct. 21-23*, 27-30*,
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Matinees

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Times For 10/28 - 10/30

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Sisters

Hate 'em, love 'em

IN HER SHOES: Directed by Curtis Hanson. Written by Susannah Grant, based on the novel by Jennifer Weiner. Produced by Ridley Scott, Carol Fenelon, Lisa Ellzey, Curtis Hanson. Executive producer, Tony Scott. Cinematography, Terry Stacey. Production design, Dan Davis. Editors Craig Kitson, Lisa Zeno Churgin. Costume design, Sophie de Rakoff. Music, Mark Isham. Starring Cameron Diaz, Toni Collette, Shirley MacLaine, with Mark Feuerstein, Richard Burgi and Brooke Smith. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005. PG-13. 130 minutes.

If you've avoided seeing *In Her Shoes* because you thought it might be a piece of chick-lit sentimentalized irony or because you have grown weary of the "cute" oldie roles played by Shirley MacLaine or that it's been way too long since Cameron Diaz did anything challenging on the screen: Think again. Director Curtis Hanson has avoided these pitfalls, rejected sticky sweet clichés and elicited fabulous performances from all three of his stars.

Hanson has created a naturalistic, layered tale of two sisters whose relationship needs to change, and a courageous grandmother who helps them find their way. He achieves this feat by generously caring about each character, which is especially important when the sisters show each other their most unlovable sides.

Writer Susannah Grant adapts Jennifer Weiner's novel liberally, including new scenes but apparently hewing closely to the book in structure. In a deliciously painful last-straw scene between the sisters, uptight workaholic lawyer and responsible older sister, Rose (Toni Collette), kicks out slutty, live-for-the-moment sister Maggie (Diaz), following an unpardonable incident with a man. No longer welcome at the home of her father and wicked stepmother, destitute and pitiful, Maggie pieces together a childhood mystery to find a woman she thinks is her long-lost grandmother, Ella (MacLaine). Ella has secrets of her own, but well before she divulges them to Maggie, she has to sort out Maggie's motives for coming to her in the first place.

Meanwhile, Rose takes a long look at herself for the first time in her adult life. The first thing she sheds is her demanding job and work persona, then pounds. Rose's former co-worker she ignored at the law office, Simon (Mark Feuerstein), wants to be Rose's friend. Actually, he wants them to be more than friends. Simon homes in on Rose's hidden sexuality and woos her with just the right degree of restraint, insistence, devotion and daring.

Shoes play a major role in Rose's life. She owns dozens of gorgeous, spiky shoes and has an entire closet where they rest on display in their original boxes. Of course, bad sister Maggie helps herself whenever, because Rose doesn't actually wear them often. The shoes are an idiosyncratic detail the film keeps returning to. I remember the powerful feeling I got in my 20s by wearing high heels, and I recall a pair of silver lamé backless shoes with three-inch metal heels I thought were sexy. Are such shoes feminine code for sexual power, I wonder, and will Rose have to wear stilettos forever if she becomes self-empowered? Yikes! Something's wrong with this picture.

Performances are excellent all around. Collette is so real she's easily able to show Rose's late blooming as a natural process of self-awareness, not just a case of the right man at the right time. Diaz is devastatingly good as the bad girl with low self-esteem and soberly wonderful as Maggie grows up. MacLaine models for us the tough love and long view that grandparents need to have to be good at their job of unconditionally loving their grandchildren.

Its clear-eyed view that the relationship between grown up siblings works best when each has done or is doing the hard work of self-actualization spells the film's triumph. Of course this axiom fits marriage partners as well as siblings, because the threads that tie us to childhood may work themselves into knots in adult relationships.

Take your friends to see this movie because it presents its subtle life lessons in a non-preachy way that will please all. Hanson's benevolent sensibilities enliven this perfect little film just as his inclusiveness enhanced one of the great films of 2000, *Wonder Boys*. Mainstream though *In Her Shoes* may be, you will not regret spending time with it. Playing now at Cinemark, this film gets my very highest recommendations.

EW