

# Arts cont'd

## Lowé lacks depth . . . surprised?

by Melissa Di Marco

*Bad Influence*  
directed by Curtis Hanson  
Triumph Releasing

*Bad Influence*, a psychological thriller starring Rob Lowe and James Spader, has the potential for real adventure and emotion. But, instead of erupting, it has a plot that sleeps on the volcano.

The story calls for character Michael Boll (Spader), a socially integrated yuppie, to compete for position of youngest senior market analyst at a firm. He is a successful executive acquiring all the accoutrements he thinks he needs. But, a shady character, Alex (Lowe), enters his life and strips away his fiancée, his security at work and all his possessions.

Alex is an amoral drifter. No ties. No past. No attachments. No rules. He introduces Michael to the underground L.A. clubs, and a friendship develops from shared hangovers, late nights and women. From an overbearing fiancée to a dishonest business rival, any obstacles Michael encounters are easily eradicated by Alex.

The plot is entertaining and easy to follow. However, a significant element of motivation is missing. Alex has no reason to destroy Michael's life, and Michael presents no reasoning for being so easily coerced into Alex's world.

On the road to ruin, the bad influence and dirty deeds flash by; they are never explored or relished.

The action is a menage of segments that only stroke the surface: glancing at the drug scene, skimming through partying lifestyles, breezing over dry sexual encounters and, through it all, bumbling over its inability to engage us emotionally.

The characters, however, are the dynamic of this skeleton. Alex, upon first impression, appears to be an easygoing confidant who is concerned with Michael, and who Michael easily invites into his life. His dark nature manifests itself slowly: from all night partying, sex, drinking and drugs to murder.

One can't deny this role provides Lowe with much character flexibility and is distinctively more villainous than any of his past roles. His waxed charm and his mild, displaced humour make him the perfect approachable



Rob Lowe (l) and James Spader (r) play bad boy and good boy respectively in Curtis Hanson's psychological thriller *Bad Influence*

stranger. But, he lacks conviction as the sociopathic terror. These moments are delivered with script

in hand.

Spader, however, is addictive. Where Lowe acts through his

lines, Spader doesn't need them. From being a stressed, competitive worker to the inebriated

robbery accomplice in a rabbit's mask, Spader's intensity and realism result in a powerhouse of sincere emotion.

The sets and lighting create a somewhat monochromatic palette, avoiding primary colours to get the flavour of black and white while shooting in colour. Faces shadowed by venetian blinds set the mood but quickly become redundant. In addition, a video camera becomes a resourceful plot and action device.

Scenes are never savoured and we are given minimal insight into the characters. The environment is never digested. The ensemble involved in this film, director Curtis Hanson, producer Steve Tisch and screenwriter David Koepp, seem to mistake vagueness in character and plot for intrigue and elusiveness.

This film is about an attraction of opposites, but it's all excitement and no impact. There is no real struggle, loss or invasion; just some uneasiness. After a few parties, two petty robberies, some sex and a murder, where else can the story take us? Just as easily as he entered into Michael's life, Alex leaves it. But, by this point, no one cares.

The naked truth of this 'little thriller' is that "no one is innocent." Thanks for the revelation.

## flawed film about love

by Ira Nayman

*Trop Belle Pour Toi*  
directed by Bertrand Blier  
*Cine Valse*

How can we explain the workings of the human heart? *Trop Belle Pour Toi* (*Too Beautiful For You*) is a film that raises this important question. And, writer/director Bertrand Blier has taken a new, entertaining approach to a highly familiar story.

Unfortunately, the film's major weakness is that it makes only the slightest effort to answer the question it asks.

*Trop Belle Pour Toi* is the story of Bernard (Gerard Depardieu), who finds himself drifting into an affair with his temporary secretary. The twist is that his wife (Carole Bouquet) is devoted, intelligent and very beautiful; his mistress, Colette (Josiane Balasko), is frumpy and shy. From the start, Blier works against our expectations.

By reversing the expected connection between physical beauty and attractiveness, Blier calls into question just what it is that makes people fall in love. But, aside from the occasional reference to needing more than perfection, Blier doesn't give us any answers or direction.

He does, on the other hand, suggest that our ideas of love and beauty are deeply ingrained. There is an exquisite scene (reminiscent of Bunuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*) in which Bertrand is taken to task by his friends at their regular dinner party for disappointing their expectations.

Depardieu (who can also currently be seen in *Camille Claudel*) gives his usual polished performance as the central character; he seems as confused as everybody else. There are a few actors (Michael Caine or Gene

Hackman) who seem to appear in every other movie; but, no matter how bad their films are (and Caine and Hackman have been in their share of stinkers), they will be worth attending for the pleasure of watching an excellent actor ply his craft.

If Philippe Noiret (who is currently starring in *Cinema Paradiso*) is the French equivalent of Hackman, Depardieu is Caine's counterpart. And, between them, Noiret and Depardieu have starred in far fewer bad films.

Balasko's portrayal of Colette, the unlikely temptress, is marvellous. She manages to invest a seemingly ordinary character with tenderness, humour and humanity. Bouquet isn't nearly as impressive as Bernard's wife, Florence, although the thinness of the part likely started with the writing.

The supporting cast is often charming and funny. Unlike North American films with their mostly bland secondary characters, many European directors like to take a few seconds of screen time to establish minor characters. This makes for a much more interesting film.

Director Blier has used a num-

ber of New Wave (or postmodern) techniques in *Trop Belle Pour Toi*, with mixed results. The camera is frequently moving towards, away from, or around characters, as if it is trying to get inside their minds. But, then characters are often shot through glass windows and partitions, suggesting that there are barriers the camera will never be able to get through.

Characters talk to themselves, which is annoyingly unrealistic. On the other hand, the punchline of the film (dealing with a running joke about the depressing nature of the music of Franz Schubert) is hilarious despite the fact it is delivered directly into the camera.

There are also a number of short dream/fantasy sequences dropped into the narrative without warning. Although amusing, they are just as frequently confusing. This is especially true in the beginning of the film, when the characters haven't been established well enough for the audience to know if they would behave in the way they seem to.

*Trop Belle Pour Toi* is a flawed film. Despite this, it is more entertaining than most North American films on the subject of love.



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