

Outrageous: two lovable crazies

by Robin Metcalfe

The road to oppression, like the road to hell, is sometimes paved with good intentions. It seems that the people who made "Outrageous" meant well. At a time when Anita Bryant is fanning the flames of anti-gay hatred, they present a case for open-hearted tolerance. Yet there is poison in this candied-apple, and it is important for us to see why.

"Outrageous" is a genuinely touching story of the friendship between two lovable "crazies". Liza is a schizophrenic who has escaped from a mental hospital to protect what sanity she still has. Robin is a gay hairdresser who yearns to re-create the glamorous women of entertainment by becoming a female impersonator, and who shelters Liza from her tormentors. Only Robin treats her as a real person and dares to be honest with her. Through him, she learns to accept her madness as a part of herself and to harness her real strengths as a person. So far, so good. One can't help but cheer on this odd couple as they take their stand against the

repressive forces of "normality". Unfortunately, the film's statements are not all so laudable. The implication is that both Robin and Liza are sick, the difference being that Robin wisely accepts his sickness while Liza hasn't yet learned to. This view of gayness is hardly an improvement over Bryant's. It encourages paternalistic tolerance instead of genuine understanding. One certainly sees little evidence in this film of the actual oppression of gays. Instead of anger, we feel pity. This is encouraged by the use of stereotyped, such as the scene in which Robin has to pay for sex with a beautiful hustler. The only oppression we see Robin suffering is at the hands of other gay men, with their hostility towards drag queens. (While such hostility does exist, it is much more ambiguous and complex than the film suggests.) The gay men in the bar scenes are almost uniformly gorgeous; gays are stereotypically (and falsely) portrayed as either slick, untouchable studs or lonely and sick (but

lovable) drag queens. It's the myth of butch and fem once again.

This film, annoyingly conveys its gay content through the use of heterosexual conventions. The strongest relationship we see, the love between Robin and Liza, tends to be perceived as a mock heterosexual romance along the lines of "Odd Couple". The only actual sex we see is straight, between Liza and her cab driver pickups. True, there are some positive shots of gay couples embracing, but we don't get to see a gay love relationship up close, either physically or emotionally.

The most appalling statement made is the parallel drawn between Robin's triumphant debut as an impersonator and Liza's stillbirth, to which it is juxtaposed. The obvious implication is that Robin, like Liza, is "dead inside", a mock woman incapable of reproduction and therefore fulfillment.

With all that said, I enjoyed the film. I rarely get to see a reflection of my own life as a faggot at the movies, especially one that is

affectionate and even remotely realistic. The strength of the film is the two central characters. Hollis McLaren as Liza is terrifyingly vulnerable and yet determined at the time. One immediately sides with her in her battle with the hospital, and her struggles to "pass the test" to win the right to control her own life. Robin's support for her is simple, direct and moving. (Not surprisingly, the film is based on a real relationship.) Craig Russell is the life of the film as entertainment. His impersonations are astoundingly effective and convincing. There is real wonder in witnessing his re-creation of the strong women of entertainment mythology. Whatever one feels about the political implications of drag (which is an important issue), one cannot deny that Craig Russell is a virtuoso at his craft.

My last criticism is, paradoxically, that the film is too short. Next time, let's see a little less pity, a lot more gay pride, and more time to explore the fascinating relationship between women and gay men.

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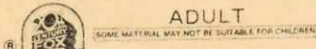
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OPENS SOON AT A THEATRE NEAR YOU

Dreams are real

by Mark Simkins

John Taylor's photographic dreams were definitely a mixed bag for this fellow dreamer. There were prints I found powerful and fascinating and others I wondered how they could have been done by the same person.

Photographic surrealism for me is most interesting when kept simple and powerful. Taylor's prints of various bizarre lawns of Los Angeles were exactly that: they conveyed a strong feeling of the weirdness of Los Angeles, California, just by showing the design of people's lawns. If there was contrivance involved (and photography always has some) it was very subtle. What I really didn't like was what Taylor did with his money

from Polaroid. He received a grant from the Polaroid Company to work in the relatively new field of instant photography.

All the SX-70 shots without exception did not appeal to me. The medium is very interesting but it does seem to have limitations in the hands of Taylor. The attempts to be bizarre just ended up being silly, which was not appealing.

The rest of the show was interesting in that a great number of photographic printing techniques were used, tinting, blueprinting, and silkscreening to name a few. However I did not find them overwhelmingly eye-catching.

Certainly Tal Taylor is an accomplished photographer but his dreams are not my dreams.

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