

# Boys Don't Cry

BY MARK EVANS

People go see *The Matrix* for both escapism and showy special effects; people watch *Heat* to see a drama about the lives of very different sorts of people. Then there are those films like *Schindler's List* that are important and take an unflinching look at some of the harshest realities of human nature. *Boy's Don't Cry* is one of those films, one that deserves to be seen beyond any inherent entertainment value.

Not to say that *Boy's Don't Cry* compares to *Schindler's List*. The latter is a grim testament to the most brutal atrocity perpetrated in modern times, while the former is a re-telling of the life of one lone girl. This movie is a monument to her life and the prejudice and hatred evidenced in some parts of our species. Things are examined on a small and minor scale, the details of the life of one person amongst the billions that make up our world.

Teena Brown, or, as she was more commonly known, Brandon Teena, was a young girl with troubles. She started off as a female, but over the years slowly reached the point where she adopted the role of a young man. Brandon felt she was meant to be a man and planned to get a sex change operation eventually. She dated young women, but never considered herself to be a lesbian. She also lied like a rug and was a petty thief.

Drowning her sorrows at a bar one night, Brandon (Hilary Swank) meets Candace (Alicia Goranson) and John (Peter Sarsgaard), whom Brandon befriends after initiating a bar brawl to protect Candace from some unwanted attention. These friends take Brandon with them to their small Nebraskan town where she soon becomes involved with Lana (Chloë Sevigny), who is semi-involved with John.

Calling John unstable would be putting it mildly, and things soon grow very strained between all con-

cerned. Finally, when Brandon's secret is discovered, things come to a shocking and tragic end. Although possibly less shocking given what we've learned of the characters by this point.

One of the unique aspects of *Boy's Don't Cry* is the nature of the people involved. I'd doubt very much that any of the characters were altered to make this more of a "movie" because none of them are particularly likeable. These are base trailer trash characters, outright rednecks who encompass every bad stereotype associated with that image.

The one possible exception here is Lana, who, while maintaining the very naïve nature of all the players in this drama, clearly grows up as a result of her relationship with Brandon. Their love shows her just what kind of a life she's leading and the people she's hanging around with and motivates her to actually try and change the status quo in her life. It's a very effective transformation.

Brandon, as I said, was a liar and a thief. She does not come off as a sympathetic character, she comes off as somebody who should have known the situation she was getting into — with regards to the people she fell in with. What is doubly sad about her death is that she not only was killed for no good reason, but that she had a number of chances to escape from the circumstances she found herself in.

Great acting abounds in this movie, no question. It's unsurprising that both Swank and Sevigny are up for Oscars for their performances. Sevigny's role in particular is very noteworthy as she moves from being a trashy drunkard to somebody whom the audience really cares about.

There are a couple of things that are worth noting about this film by way of warning. Firstly, this film is graphic. It was originally rated NC-17 before being cut, but it's still plenty adult. When dealing with a



Boy's Don't Cry is brutal

subject of this nature it is expected that there'll be a certain amount of sex, and the nature of the sex makes it something that will be hard for some people to watch. Second, and far less importantly, things do drag a little towards the end of the film. A little more editing might have tightened the pace a bit better.

Bottom line: When I say *Boy's Don't Cry* is brutal, I'm not kidding. The last half hour in particular doesn't pull any punches in terms of bringing its point home to the viewer. Still, even for those whose particular views would stop them from seeing this film, I recommend it anyway. It shows the most ugly side of prejudice that can possibly exist, and it's all the more important because it's based on a true story. To think that somebody actually lived Brandon Teena's life is a cold reminder of the reality of the world we inhabit. Three and a half stars out of four.

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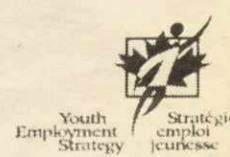
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