

Recipe for bio-pic on country warbler Patsy Cline includes some spicy performances but a sour script

By ALEX PATTERSON

Seeing Red

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compelling evidence of CP members actually spying for the Soviet Union. As one of the interviewees of the film observes, this was particularly impressive in view of the constant surveillance that the FBI maintained on known CP members from the 1930s onward. Despite the intense public pressure on Communists within unions and the HUAC hearings, relatively few members resigned from the Party during this period. It was not until Soviet Premier resigned from the Party during this period. It was not until Soviet Premier Khrushchev revealed the horror of Stalin's regime in 1956 that American Party membership was decimated. The Left's confidence in socialism was completely destroyed by the discovery that Russia had succumbed to totalitarianism, resulting in the resignation of 80 percent of the American CP within two years.

Seeing Red is a fine chronicle of the history of the American Communist Party, and the role of the Left in the United States before the 1960s. Unfortunately, the film abruptly skips 25 years to reconvene with the present-day lives of the Communist Party members it has interviewed. It is unclear why the rise of the New Left during the 1960s is unexamined, although this may be a reflection of the obsolescence of the American Communist Party. The film's concluding footage of past Party members at anti-nuke demonstrations may be thematically appropriate, yet it gives the impression that the eclipse of the CP was the demise of the Left.

Sweet Dreams is the film biography of country crooner Patsy Cline, who like her contemporary Loretta Lynn, rose from humble beginnings to chart-topping success. Loretta Lynn, whose rags-to-royon story was enacted by Sissy Spacek in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, lived a life less sensational than Patsy Cline, yet yielded a better film.

This is no fault of Jessica Lange, whose portrayal of Patsy Cline likely will be competing with Vanessa Redgrave's performance in *Wetherby* at Oscar time next Spring. Nor can anyone blame her leading man Ed Harris (*Places In The Heart*), as Patsy's Brylcreemed husband Charly, who manages to make this hell raising good ol' boy with too much confidence and not enough brains into someone the audience won't hiss at. Mr. Harris should be congratulated for making a printer who beats his wife and plays air guitar along with the music infinitely more watchable than he has any right to be.

Director Karel Reisz (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*), follows Cline's public life and private life from the Virginia roadhouse circuit in 1956 to her accidental death in 1963, with a camera that is steady and assured, if not terribly probing.

The main problem with *Sweet Dreams*—the explanation of why such excellent performances haven't made for a more satisfying movie—is with Robert Getchell's script. Everyone has done the best they could with the weak material, but as Bette Midler once pithily remarked, "If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage."

The recipe for a bio-pic is simply itself: present the most important events in the life of some famous person in chronological order, then pad

the thing out to the required length with footage of the person doing whatever it is they are famous for. A really good bio-pic, of course, will do more than this, but that is the bare minimum.

Screenwriter Getchell has provided the basics of the genre, but either will not or can not go that extra mile which separates the competent from the exemplary. Considering that his writing of *Bound For Glory*—another curiously flat experience—did much the same thing to the exciting life of Woody Guthrie, Getchell's deficiency lies with his seeming inability to make anything very interesting come out of people's mouths. Although he evokes a strong sense of time and place with his mastery of Southern dialect and period profanity ("bump your uglies" for intercourse), much of the

dialogue is banal and repetitive.

Getchell misses the opportunity to investigate the moral dilemmas of the "nouveaux riches," and makes little attempt to place Cline in the larger social context. Cline is not meant to stand as a symbol for anything, nor is anyone or anything else in the movie. Everything just *is*. If Charly clobbers Patsy, it is defined as just a domestic squabble, and not part of any wider rift in male/female relations of that era or of that part of the world.

This constrains the script, rendering it too literal and specific to involve the movie fan the way it might the Patsy Cline fan. *Coal Miner's Daughter* had a more universal appeal, and fared better at drawing the uninitiated into the sometimes strange milieu of country music. The lack of historical sense in *Sweet*

Dreams is not, however, as irritating as its flaccid dialogue and slow pace. In light of the shortcomings of the screenplay's "Just the facts, ma'am" mentality, the strong performances of Ed Harris and especially Jessica Lange redeem the film as a whole.

The music—and there's a lot of it—is Patsy Cline's singing with Jessica Lange's damned-near perfect lip-synching. The original recordings have been cleaned with the latest technology and they sound terrific. The look of the movie is similarly impressive, with well-decorated sets nicely photographed. Visually, at least, it captures the honky-tonk South of two and a half decades ago, back when the spiritual home of country music was still Nashville, and not Beverly Hills.

Editors hassled

Once upon a production night . . .

Okay? Are you happy? You've ruined my day,
my life, my state of mind, but that's O.K.,
you've got your goddamn bold facing con-
tinueds, what do you care about the well-being
of a lowly typesetter who ranks just above bath-
tub slime on the status scale?



Jewish Student Federation and
BETH SHOLOM SYNAGOGUE PRESENT

A College Students Weekend with Danny Siegel October 25, 26, 27

Danny Siegel, witty lecturer, poet, author and philosopher, who has addressed many college groups and young people in North America and Israel, will spend an eventful weekend at Beth Sholom Synagogue as a scholar in residence.

Friday, October 25 - 8:00 p.m. Student participation service, followed by Oneg Shabbat, and light refreshments.

Topic: "Where Heaven and Earth Touch: Applications of Torah and Talmud to Real Life".
Discussion period follows.

Saturday, October 26 - 8:45 a.m. Services followed by Kiddish Luncheon (by advance registration only).

Topic: "The Transition from College to Real Life".
Also: An afternoon group study session.
8:00 p.m. - PUB (Licensed)

Sunday, October 27 - 9:00 a.m. Morning services, followed by breakfast.

Topic: "Every Day Miracles: Real Life Tzedaka".
Discussion follows.

Total cost for all events in the package is \$17 per person, payable to Beth Sholom Synagogue. Reservations will be appreciated on or before October 18. For further information and reservations for any or all of the events of the Danny Siegel weekend, contact Greta Reiss of the Jewish Student Federation, 667-3647.

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