

## Stagey Orphans, not Too Outrageous and the power of Sammy and Rosie Get Laid

By MICHAEL REDHILL

### Orphans Alan J. Pakula

From the relatively small school of intelligent American filmmakers comes Alan J. Pakula's adaptation of Lyle Kessler's play *Orphans*. *Orphans* is a story of two brothers, Treat (Matthew Modine) and Phillip (Kevin Anderson) who live alone in an abandoned mansion in Newark. Treat is a petty thief who steals to support himself and his disturbed child-like brother. Pakula has created a fairly complex relationship between the two; Phillip is completely reliant on Treat while maintaining control over his gullible brother by convincing him that the air outside the house would kill him if he ever dared venture past the front door.

The foil in Treat's set-up is the man he "kidnaps" turns out to be a mobster and ends up as the boys surrogate father. Harold (Albert Finney) takes on Treat as a message boy slowly breaks apart the myth of the outside world that has been assembled so meticulously for Phillip. The result is a meditation on the nature of control as well as the fight for control of one's own and other's lives.

Pakula's film is literate and stage-like, having been taken almost directly from the play. (Kessler also wrote the screenplay.) However, it fails to make the transition completely. The film's setting is mostly restricted to the house and as a result often looks like a theatre stage, making the sensibility of this film a toggle switch that goes from "cinema" to "stageplay."

One positive result of the film's 'stagelike' quality is very well realized characters, and two correspondingly good performances. Anderson steals the movie as Phillip, and Finney is flawless.

Unfortunately, Modine seems to be unfamiliar with a character whose rage is all-consuming. He plays the character with almost no change in timbre from start to finish. The result is a homogenous performance by an otherwise promising actor.

### Sammy and Rosie Get Laid Stephen Frear

Sunday night, Stephen Frear introduced his new film by saying that it was about those who presume to rule over others. But *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* runs much deeper than that. It is a cold-eyed examination of different kinds of love and power as well as the control inherent in both.

She story is about Rafi Rahman (Shashi Kapoor), an Indian dignitary, who is returning to London to visit his son Sammy (Ayub Kahn Din) and Sammy's wife, Rosie (Frances Barber). Rafi comes to escape his country where he is in danger, having tortured for so long those who opposed him. He has also come to rekindle a romance with a lost love, Alice (Claire Bloom) who he has loved over all this time.

But the film takes place in London (maybe not of today) that is full of anger and violence. It is a world of destruction, burning cars and racial intolerance. Also, it is a world full of no commitment relationships, of man-haters, of people who are at ease knowing that a stranger might wait for them in their own home. Rosie confronts Rafi with his crimes in a restaurant, but Rafi is a chameleon... he defends his crimes without admitting he has ever done anything wrong... class struggle is class struggle. Look at the streets of London.

Frear has imbued this film with a kinetic brilliance. Its images are

Pakula's direction is strong and focused. However, he seems anxious to evoke tears, and some scenes that should be moving seem dishonest. The last scene in the film is a major failure for just that reason. Pakula opts for an all-out crying match that distances the audience, and ultimately, destroys the scenes credibility. Aside from these flaws—could this be the fault of a male director having to deal with complex male relationships—*Orphans* is a rewarding film.



UNLIKELY TRIO: 'Father' Albert Finney (centre) is kidnapped by fatherless brothers Matthew Modine (left) and Kevin Anderson in Alan J. Pakula's *Orphans*.

### Too Outrageous Dick Benner

I want to recommend *Too Outrageous!* It's Canadian and it's sorta AIDS literate, and Craig Russell doesn't seem to be such a bad guy. But I can't. I can't even muster a friendly word about this film, because it is a tiresome unfunny insulting film. The only reason it's even in the Festival is because its precursor, *Outrageous!*, premiered in the 1977 Festival Of Festivals.

This film premieres as a badly misplaced sense of nostalgia. I never saw the original, so I can't say if this improves on it, but if it does, *Outrageous!* was a very sorry film indeed. The sequel follows female impersonator Robin Turner (Craig

unforgiving, at first bleak and then surreal, it is a film made with a powerful eye. Likewise, Hanif Kureishi's script is mysterious, building its own logic as it goes.

The film's remarkable climax comes after a party Sammy and Rosie hold for Rafi. The three go off in fateful couplings, Sammy with his lover Anna (Wendy Gazelle), Rosie with Danny (Roland Gift), a street black who lives in a caravan, and Rafi with Alice. Typical of a script this realized, the scene forges its own metaphors.

Sammy and Anna argue, their love-making is fraught with sexual politics and repression. Rosie and Danny are passion unapologizing, a white woman and a black man in punishing times; their love is a redemption of intolerance. And then there is Rafi, who is traditional, full of gentleness and humour. He is the hub around which the destruction in this film turns. His tenderness is a mask for violence.

Frear's film does not point a finger or moralize, however Justice is meted out in its own way. All violence is accepted, be it violence of repression, revolution or revenge... but it is met with the justice borne of that unending logic.

*Sammy And Rosie Get Laid* is a difficult, brilliant film that does the near impossible: the film speaks of explosive power and the desire to control that is inherent in every relationship: person to person and army to army. And it does it with subtlety, grace, wit and humour. And of the performances: unerring.

Russell) on his rise to stardom. I'm not sure if this implies the original left him in the gutter, but I can tell you if it does, he'll be back in it after this.

The plot is as thin as crepe paper and follows an incurably dull formula. Since the film's prerogative is to get in as much female impersonation as possible, the movie degenerates into Robin onstage punctuated by Robin off-stage with his entourage, Robin on drinking binges, Robin philosophizing, until it's time to

dump the plot for more stagework.

The funny thing is, he's not all that good. In fact, another female impersonator is onscreen for five minutes and does a Marilyn Monroe that blows anything Craig Russell can do off the screen.

But most offensive is *Too Outrageous!*'s smarmy attempt at being politically vogue. In one scene, Robin's manager, Bob (David McIlwraith), has discovered that his lover (who suddenly had a coughing fit two minutes earlier) has AIDS. He breaks into a devastatingly stupid monologue about making the most of your life, and how Robin has so much going for him. Gallows humour? No... Dick Benner has proven that even the most moving human tragedies can be made into farce. Worst of all, he's done it accidentally. There is no sympathy for a film like this that wastes its chance to enlighten. It is also remarkably unfunny. For your benefit, here is the only funny exchange in the movie:

Hollywood Talent Agent: If you're from Canada, why don't you do Anne Murray?

Robin Turner: I can't, I'm too feminine.

Here's your six bucks back. Avoid this turkey: it's death by nylon and melodrama.

### South of Reno Mark Rezyka

A fine performance by Jeffrey Osterhage in this film about a man living in the Nevada desert with his unfaithful wife and a television. *South of Reno* tries to make a statement about TV's role in the life of the lonely, but it doesn't go far enough.

Director Mark Rezyka seems so romanced by the landscape and his character's dreams that he loses sight of an important vision.

This film is seriously wounded by a nasty dream sequence near the end that leaves some of the plot in doubt. Still, a good film from a new director. If it finds a distributor, it'll most likely show up at the Carlton. If not, the Bloor is a possibility.

Sidenote: *South of Reno* also offers actor Joe Phelan, this year's Martin Sheen look-alike.

Watch for reviews of Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard The Mermaids Singing* and Katherine Bigelow *Near Dark*.

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