

To Wong Foo Thanks For Nothing

Weak plot development and a lackluster performance by Swayze deflate an original idea

Amy Uptmor
THE BATTALION

A movie that begins with RuPaul as "Rachel Tensions," the drag queen of the universe, dressed in a sequined confederate and descending into a ballroom full of fellow queens, would have to be bold, racy and ready to break down barriers. If only that was the case with *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*.

Swayze, Wesley Snipes and John Leguizamo as drag queens who get stranded in a middle-American small town, is a safe attempt at introducing the mainstream to the drag lifestyle.

MOVIE REVIEW
To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar
Starring Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze, John Leguizamo
Directed by Beeban Kidron
Rated PG-13
Playing at Hollywood 16
★ ★ 1/2 (out of five)

boyancy of the drag scene.

What is missed most by playing it safe, though, is a plot. *To Wong Foo* is like *Son In Law*

light of every stereotype associated with the gay culture rather than trying to move the audience past those stereotypes.

What is equally sad is that a movie centered around such a taboo subject could actually last over one-and-a-half hours and not butt heads with a single issue. Certain subjects are certainly mentioned — a family coming to terms with their cross-dressing son, police hostility towards gays and cross-dressers and, as a side issue, spouse abuse. But none of the

issues receive more than 10 minutes of screen time.

Of course, this movie is a comedy and is not necessarily under orders to attack any issues. It is just a shame that a ground-breaking movie with such a large potential audience barely attempted to actually break any ground.

The casting is equally disappointing. Swayze as Vida Boheme, the oldest and wisest of the three queens, succeeds in this role about as well as Kevin Costner did when he tried to play someone British.

Swayze never looks or acts like more than a big, beefy man dressed up as a woman. This is ironic, given that his character serves as a mentor to Chi Chi Rodriguez (Leguizamo), an aspiring drag queen who Boheme — or she, however the viewer wants to see it — accuses of being nothing more than a "boy in a dress."

The ordering of this mentor-pupil setup is also ironic, given that Leguizamo's performance is the saving grace of this movie. Chi Chi is all that is drag — sassy, loud and full of attitude. His one-liners give the movie a kick-start every time it seems to be on the verge of death.

Snipes' performance also deserves applause. Snipes' character, Noxeema Jackson, rivals Leguizamo in the attitude department and is almost solely responsible for transforming the small town's residents into flamboyant, sassy dressers and (almost) thinkers.

But *To Wong Foo*'s fails miserably in comparison to *Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, a witty, honest portrayal of drag queens. If such an ex-



Leguizamo

cellent movie on the subject had not already been released, *To Wong Foo* could at least score points for being the first movie of its kind.

Unfortunately, *To Wong Foo* lacks the substance and acting to score points for much of anything.



John Leguizamo, Wesley Snipes, and Patrick Swayze play three drag queens en route to Hollywood in *To Wong Foo*. Queens Chi Chi, Noxeema, and Vida find themselves stranded in a small midwestern town.

Tight suspense and action make up for unlikely scenario

Helen Clancy
THE BATTALION

Adoption can be a dangerous thing. Parents never know what kind of wild child or nutcase they could end up with. But in *The Tie That Binds*, the child isn't the problem. In fact, everything would have turned out great if the kid's reckless, murdering biological parents had not come back into the picture.

From the producers of *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, this film portrays an adopting parent's worst nightmare. When a picture-perfect couple shows up to adopt Janie, an angelic six-year old girl, they have no idea that her parents are armed criminals out to track down their daughter.

Although the movie is full of action and suspense, it constantly leaves the viewer confused. Much of the dialogue awkwardly out of character, and little background is given to identify the characters. *The Tie That Binds* lacks depth and offers no logical explanations or foreshadowing for several pivotal events.

The opening scene shows Janie (Julia

MOVIE REVIEW
The Tie That Binds
Starring Daryl Hannah, Keith Carradine
Directed by Wesley Strick
Rated R
Playing at Schulman 6
★ ★ ★ (out of five)

Devin) waiting in her parents' car while they are robbing a nearby house. A suspicious neighbor calls the cops, and an officer takes Janie just as her parents start to make their getaway. Oddly, the two patrol cars and armed officers are no match for Janie's parents, who are armed with a bag of food and a Polaroid camera. The couple incredibly manages to escape on foot, leaving their daughter behind in police custody.

The next implausible element is the negligence of the Social Services. For some reason, the social workers ignore the criminal background of the case and allow the well-meaning Cliftons to adopt Janie. It never occurs to them that stripping a child from her murderous parents and giving her to a defenseless yuppie

couple might be a bad situation.

Although Keith Carradine's performance as the deranged biological father is overacted and hard to swallow, Daryl Hannah's powerful performance makes up for his comical "insanity." Hannah plays the distraught biological mother, Leann Netherwood. Her performance is believable and almost reminiscent of her role as a mental patient in *Crazy People*.

Hannah convinces the audience that beneath her criminal brutality and lunacy, she is still just a mother who wants her child back.

Devin offers an excellent performance as the young Janie. Her innocence allows the viewer to identify with her feelings of trauma and fear.

While Devin's portrayal manages to keep the viewer intent, several oddities constantly detract from her performance. The unmentioned family history of Janie's parents leaves the viewer wondering how they became such hardened criminals. Also, it is never explained why these criminals would go to so much trouble to find their daughter.

Other questions arise concerning why the police force is so inept that they



Daryl Hannah plays criminal Leann Netherwood, who attempts to make contact with her estranged daughter Janie (Julia Devin) in *The Tie That Binds*.

can't find Janie's parents. These and other abnormalities constantly weaken the movie's plot.

The Tie That Binds might not be an intellectual thriller, but it does offer

unrelenting suspense and action. Talented performances by Hannah and Devin keep the movie going and give the questionable plot development a touch of credibility.

Siberry offers fluid jazz with improvisation

Erin Hill
THE BATTALION

People wandering around in Manhattan's Greenwich Village can hear strains of music. They descend a particularly dark and steep staircase that seems to be going nowhere, only to find a charming jazz club tucked inside.

The club is Small's, and on any given night, people can find jazz in all of its forms being performed there, usually by unknown and talented artists who perform because of their love of music.

ALBUM REVIEW
Jane Siberry
Maria
Reprise Records
★ ★ ★ 1/2 (out of five)

Jane Siberry's latest album *Maria* feels like it was recorded at a club just like Small's. Despite her past success in non-jazz music genres, Siberry wanted to tamper with it and try something new.

She recruited a drummer and bassist who had played with jazz prodigy Joshua Redman and got Tim Ray on keyboards, who performed with both Lyle Lovett and the jazz ensemble Blue Then Orange.

After recruiting Ray's talent, Siberry said, "I thought these were the two best pianists I'd ever seen — until I realized they were the same man." In addition, she has David Travers-Smith on trumpet, and he lends a clean brassy sound to the already tasty mix.

The sound is certainly, as one press release puts it, "loose, fluid and electric with improvisation." It provides a wonderful frame for the interesting pictures Siberry paints with her music.

The painted pictures on this record are divided into two rather distinct sections — the first nine songs and the last song, "Oh, My My," which is 20 minutes long and is separated from

the other tracks by a two-minute space.

It is just like Siberry, who bent convention memorably in her previous albums, especially on the intriguing *When I Was A Boy*, to play with not only content and format, but production techniques as well.

Her album *Bound by the Beauty*, in fact, was recorded in the middle of an apple orchard. It comes as no surprise that she put *Maria* together her way, which was to record it all in a three-day session and then play around with the tracks in her living room for the next three months.

As always, Siberry's record is full of motifs and recurring thoughts. In the case of *When I Was A Boy*, those motifs were spiritual in nature — candles, prayers, priests and all things Catholic.

On *Maria*, an album with a decidedly connotative name, the motifs are a bit different — lullabies, children, lambs, sacrifices and people who are lost and found.

She plays with the listeners by borrowing well-known and beloved words and images and putting them in the most surprising spots in her own music.

In her off-beat love song "Lovin' Cup," she sings, "Cup of wonder, cup of light / Cup of royal beauty bright." In "Oh, My My," she is joined by a children's choir singing "Puff the Magic Dragon" as she sings, "Mary had a little lamb ... its fleece was ... oh."

Siberry plays by her own rules and never sells out. This makes *Maria* hard to believe and delightful to listen to.

Jones shows range of musical talent in new album Naked Songs

Erin Hill
THE BATTALION

ALBUM REVIEW
Rickie Lee Jones
Naked Songs
Reprise Records
★ ★ ★ ★ (out of five)

Rickie Lee Jones changes musical emphasis almost as often as Madonna, just without showing so much skin.

Speaking of states of undress, *Naked Songs*, Jones' latest album, is a real treat, stripped down to just Jones, her guitar and her piano.

If Joni Mitchell is the queen of singer and songwriters, then Rickie Lee Jones is surely the princess next in line for the throne. Jones has established herself as a true royal during her career, which includes the critically acclaimed albums *Rickie Lee Jones*, *Pirates*, *Flying Cowboys and Pop*, *Pop*. Fans might recognize her from the *Sleepless in Seattle* soundtrack.

That voice. Is it beautiful or just baffling? Perhaps both. At times her voice sounds like a string instrument, a violin, but sometimes she sounds like a saxophone or something else entirely, not always human.

The most impressive thing about Jones and her music is her spontaneity and the easy-going way she performs and plays. Throughout *Naked Songs*, which is a live retrospective, Jones sounds relaxed and comfortable. She jokes a little with the audience but doesn't talk too much, spending most of her time singing such Rickie classics as "Last Chance Texaco," "Chuck E's in Love" and "Weasel."

See JONES, Page 4



Siberry