

ly top class comedy duos and they both made very impressive, and almost believable, ladies. The beautiful Elizabeth Stanley, as Sugar Kane, spends a lot of her stage time in a partial state of undress and shows that she can measure up to Monroe in many important respects (she also has a much better singing

review: the talent given us

There is a limit to what I can tell you about the independent movie *The Talent Given Us*, so you will just have to trust me when I say this movie is a must-see. It opened at the Sag Harbor Cinema last Friday.

I had been skeptical. When I hear the term "independent," I think pretentious, depressing, grainy, confusing. That is confounded by the fact that the movie was filmed on a single, hand-held camera, which I took to mean I would feel nauseated while my brain tried to convert the jittery movements into a stable picture. Plus, the film stars the writer/director's immediate family members playing versions of themselves. Reality TV, anyone? But my preconceptions were way off.

Within the first five minutes of watching this film, I was riveted. It is hilarious, fascinating, uncomfortable, and touching all at once. I wrote that I cannot tell you much about the movie for two reasons. I do not want to give anything away about the story of the dysfunctional, but loving family. It is not as though there are surprises in the sense of *The Sixth Sense*. Quite the contrary, the story unfolds so naturally and with such honesty that it could be about many families. True, the members of this family wear their hearts on their sleeves and speak more forthrightly about more intimate topics than do many families, but I suspect that everyone who watches the movie will recognize something in themselves and at the same time take comfort in the fact (or complete fiction) that their family is not as dysfunctional as that portrayed in the movie. Watching the conversations unfold was so enjoyable that I do not want to ruin them for the reader by reporting on the specifics.

Another reason I am limited in what I can report is that this is a very adult movie, with difficult

(Josephine), played by Kirk Mouser, switches genders frequently while trying to keep up his disguise but also while trying to persuade Sugar that he is a wealthy playboy. Meanwhile, Daphne (Jerry), played by Larry Rabin, is kept busy fighting off the amorous advances of an aging and very wealthy playboy, Sir



themes and harsh language, not appropriate for reproduction in this paper. The movie is not for children at all, nor for the faint of heart. The father is ailing, the mother is emotionally and sexually frustrated, one of the daughters brings her endless time

ductions of Broadway quality and at prices a third of what you have to pay nowadays in Manhattan, is a wonderful benefit for all musical theater lovers on Long Island who will be eagerly awaiting news early next year of the 2006 offerings.

—Roy Bradbrook

in therapy into brutally honest conversations with her family, there are drugs, and so on. But this caution is not meant to suggest that the film is anything but wonderfully enjoyable, thanks to the film's generous use of humor and love mixed in with the pathos. Think Eugene O'Neill meets Woody Allen.

The movie is terrific in its own right, as a story about a family. Andrew Wagner's script is tight and utterly real, his direction and cinematography professional, and his family's acting completely natural. Yet, one cannot review the movie solely on the basis of its qualities. Wagner's parents Allen and Judith (who are not actors), his sisters Emily and Maggie (both actors) and friends Billy Wirth and Judy Dixon (also actors) play themselves. I do not know how much of the film reveals Wagner's family's and friends' true personalities, conflicts, and life events or how much of the script is fiction, but whatever the answer, his family's and friends' willingness to expose some version of themselves — and to do so with such honesty in their portrayals — is amazing.

The movie, which seems to be heading towards cult classic status, is being privately distributed. While it has received critical acclaim and the attention of a number of Hollywood's glitterati, it still only plays in art houses in a small number of cities. It has been interesting to read that Hollywood had a terrible summer at the box office, no doubt because many people decided that the endless array of sequels, remakes and high-concept films were not worth the price of admission. I suspect that before long *The Talent Given Us* will attract a Hollywood distributor willing to give the film appropriate advertising and a broader release. I also suspect that the film will be remembered when the Academy Award nominations are announced. But do not wait until then to see it.

—David Stoll

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