

Melodramatic 'Tic Code' 'Urban Legend' Takes Slasher Films to a New Low

The wife of a jazz musician with Tourette's syndrome wrote and stars in this exploration of the affliction.

By JEREMY HURTZ
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Polly Draper, writer and star of "The Tic Code," obviously has noble intentions. The audience would like to sympathize with her well-meant tale of unity through adversity. If only the movie weren't so very, very bad.

Draper plays the divorced mother of a 12-year-old boy with Tourette's syndrome. Her son Miles (Christopher George Marquette), a gifted pianist, is crippled not so much by his disorder but by his embarrassment about it.

Miles feels like his father abandoned his mother over his Tourette's syndrome, and frankly, he's right.

In steps saxophonist Tyrone (Gregory Hines), who also has Tourette's but won't even discuss it with anyone but Miles — they speak the same "code." Miles' mom falls in love with Tyrone, but the musician can't believe she's interested in him except as a father for Miles.

This leads to conflict, most of which is absurdly melodramatic and telegraphed far ahead of time. The movie's climax should be predictable a

full hour early to anyone familiar with the film technique of the foreshadowing close shot.

Draper does strike a suitably forlorn, exhausted tone with her performance. Unfortunately, her sentimental script hits nothing but wrong notes.

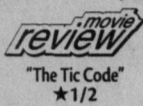
The story isn't quite autobiographical, but Draper has a definite connection to the material. She's married to jazz musician Michael Wolff, who composed music from the film and who has Tourette's. As one might expect, her film doesn't seem dishonest or manipulative. But honesty alone can't make a film interesting.

No character in the movie ever breaks free from his or her own stereotype. Their relationships are transparent and the dialogue is often forced.

Gary Winick's direction is equally bland. To indicate Miles' fragmented state of mind when a particularly bad attack hits, he switches from color film to jumpy black-and-white — a tired gimmick that doesn't work here.

"The Tic Code" played at this year's Berlin International Film Festival. It didn't win, as the film's official Web site claims, the prize for Best Picture — rather, it received the Glass Bear, an award voted on by a child jury for the best film at the festival's Children's Film Fest.

Perhaps the juvenile motivations and Marquette's charismatic performance would appeal to children, who might not be bored by the overdrawn conflicts of stock characters. But I can't believe the average child's attention would be held through aimless scenes with languid dialogue. Mine wasn't.



"The Tic Code" ★1/2

By JUSTIN WINTERS
Staff Writer

With a handy thesaurus, one might find many serviceable synonyms for the word bad: abhorrent, base, beastly, blameworthy, corrupt, criminal, etc.

If there is any justice in this world, Webster will add "teenage slasher film" to collectively group dreadful wastes of time like "Urban Legends: Final Cut" in the same category.



"Urban Legends: Final Cut" ★1/2

"Legends," the sequel to the ironically also unpleasant 1998 film "Urban Legend," gets a nice start at the gun only to falter like an Olympic runner who pulls a "hammy" soon after.

For those who even care, "Legends" revolves around a group of shallow film students who have wisely decided to take a stab at filming a thesis project starring a serial killer who disposes of his victims by using off-forgotten and lame urban legends.

Director John Ottman, who bypassed composing the score for "X-Men" to

direct this film, should be forced to watch "Legends" consecutively for days and days, without food or water, until he realizes the extent of his blunder. Shame on him for letting such a tainted script infect an otherwise promising idea for a scary movie.

His actors seem at times to be reciting such moronic dialogue that they can't believe their own words, and the decision to use a fencing mask as a killer's costume kept me guessing when the rest of the team would show up.

Even the requisite carnage looks like something straight off the \$1 rental shelf of the video store. Note to John: causing more laughter than the intentionally funny "Scary Movie" is not a good thing.

Visually, Ottman does have a few, and very few, good things going for him. His decision to use different camera styles and his set up of one chase scene in particular do carry some merit that contrasts wildly with every other scene, particularly those involving actors talking.

Does it really matter who starred in the film? Loretta Devine, who is the only repeat from the original film, and



A not-so-scary killer chases Vanessa (Eva Mendes, left) and Amy (Jennifer Morrison) to the top of a clock tower in "Urban Legends II."

Joseph "Whoa" Lawrence of old-school "Blossom" fame are the only recognizable faces. To protect the others, maybe it is best to just forget the fact that they ever took part in the film.

Then they won't be faced with their

memories of "Legends" and how substandard, unsatisfactory, useless and vile it really was.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Tepid 'Woman On Top' Showcases Cruz, Not Much More

By ALLISON ROST
Staff Writer

You'd think a movie titled "Woman On Top" would push some limits.

Instead, this tepid "romantic" comedy exists only to showcase the physical attributes of Spanish movie star Penelope Cruz.



"Woman On Top" ★

Isabella (Cruz) is a gifted Brazilian

chef who discovers her husband is cheating and takes off for San Francisco to test the culinary waters there.

She can't find a job at a restaurant, but gets discovered by a local television producer (Mark Feuerstein) who gives her a cooking show and falls in love with her.

However, Isabella still pines for her husband, and her cooking is suffering as a result. He follows her to San Francisco, and she has to decide if she should swallow her pride and take him back.

The title stems from Isabella's motion sickness — an affliction that requires she always be the driver in a car, lead on the dance floor, and ... you get the picture.

This motion sickness is supposedly what drives her husband to stray, and whenever he's on-screen after that, he's portrayed as a complete pig.

At the same time, the kindhearted television producer is willing to do anything for Isabella.

Therefore, it's highly disappointing when their roles suddenly reverse three-quarters of the way through the movie, and the guy you were rooting for suddenly becomes the jerk.

Much of the movie is this way — completely confusing. It's presented as a fairy tale, with Isabella receiving her cooking talent from an ocean goddess as a child. The film's mysticism comes across as stupid and inane.

Throng of men follow Isabella

through the streets of San Francisco because of her gift, and smells of her dishes inspire everyone to get it on right then and there.

Differences between the United States and Brazil are hinted at but never create a coherent theme. With bad jokes and obviously dubbed-over lines, it all creates this jumbled mess.

Cruz does indeed light up the screen and shows a lot of promise, but here she's given very little of interest to do.

Harold Perrineau Jr. turns in a decent performance as Isabella's drag-queen friend Monica. Unfortunately, many of his lines fall horribly flat.

Besides that, the only good thing about "Woman On Top" are the sweeping visuals of San Francisco. Now there's something to fantasize about.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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| | |
|---|--|
| A | Tell her to stick her head out the window and let it rip. |
| B | Quickly swerve over and open the door so she doesn't get any in your car. |
| C | With one hand on the wheel, hold her hair back while she barfs in her purse. |
| D | NONE OF ABOVE.* |
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