

'Veronique' abstract yet thought-provoking

The Double Life of Veronique

Irene Jacob, Philippe Volter

directed by Krzysztof Kielowski

Chelsea
968-3005
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Those of you who have been weaned on a healthy diet of horror movies and flimsy Hollywood fluff and have a pre-conceived notion of foreign films to show for it may want to steer clear of *The Double Life of Veronique*, as (a) it's full of impossible coincidences which ultimately go unexplained, (b) its story is left completely wide-open and unresolved, and (c) it's visually vague and abstract. In

NED DIRLIK Movie

other words, it follows virtually every unfortunate stereotype of the "foreign movie," and ends up as thought-provoking as it is infuriating.

Director/writer Krzysztof Kielowski presents the lives of Veronika and Veronique, two "different" women who were born on the same day, and are both played by the same actress, Irene Jacob. One lives in France and the other in Poland, but they are both talented singers with similar lifestyles, and there is clearly a deep metaphysical connection between the two. Though they never actually speak to each other, each seems somehow aware of the other's existence, and the film's most meaningful moments come as they explore the mutual sensation that they are somehow not alone in this world.

The first part of the film concerns the Polish Veronika, as she goes to Krakow to stay with her aunt, wins an audition to perform with an orchestra and then dies in mid-performance from an inherited heart condition. This initial "act," which is dominated by shadow and filmed with a purveyant darkness, is forebodingly suggestive of death; Veronika seems to exist on the edge of a perpetual twilight, and her death comes as no real surprise.

As the last bit of dirt is thrown on Veronika's grave, the locale switches to France, and the life of Veronique,

who is inexplicably overcome by a feeling of mourning at the moment of her "twin's" death. She immediately quits her singing lessons (as if learning from Veronika's "mistakes"), only to become embroiled in an obsessive relationship with an elusive puppeteer (Philippe Volter) which takes her to Paris. Her search for him mirrors her search for a true identity, and as their relationship progresses, she understands those feelings that she has never been "alone," though no explanation of the connection between the two women is ever given.

The presence of the beautiful, vulnerable Irene Jacob saturates the screen with an emotional need, and her performance is easily the highlight of the film.

Kielowski's directing is admirable in its own right, however — he films in rich, amber tones, creating a world perhaps a bit more akin to the realm of the soul than our own. He's a director who likes to take chances; his images either work (coming across as sensitive, effective and profound) or they don't (ending up blatant and pretentious). The complete absence of subtlety from his directorial style leaves no middle ground. His bravery in tackling a cerebral, metaphysical theme with various cinematic tricks can be commended, but sometimes it only adds to the confusion.

An example of this is the death of Veronika, as she hauntingly sings before the orchestra. The initial scenes of this sequence are among the most beautiful in the film; the camera perfectly captures the power of the event,



Irene Jacob as Veronique ... or is it Veronika ... or is it Felix?

the almost desperate intensity of the voice singing out to an impending doom. Suddenly, though, the camera takes Veronika's point of view, as it twists, turns and contorts wildly before finally crashing down to a final resting place on the floor. How embarrassing it would be, to share the private moment of death with thousands of people! Though it's a courageous attempt, this cuts through the poignancy like a butcher knife.

This is a film of such images, however, and if Kielowski didn't take his chances, some of the film's most beautiful images wouldn't have been possible. The haunting puppet show of a

ballerina who breaks her leg and turns into a butterfly; Veronika stumbling through a downpour, pursued by a dreadful, nameless fear that only she can perceive; Veronique's dreamy vision of her dying "twin" — all are stunning images, and they bring the metaphysical message, not easily reproduced, successfully to the screen.

This film is not easy to understand, and the mystery is at times too much — Kielowski creates an excessive number of similarities between the two, and doesn't explain them. Still, the film has too many good qualities to ignore; it will linger on in your mind for some time after you see it.

MOVIE BRIEF

The Cutting Edge

D.B. Sweeney, Moira Kelly
directed by Paul Glaser

Plaza I-III
967-4737

Doug (D.B. Sweeney), dumb jock incarnate, can no longer play hockey when he loses some peripheral vision in the 1988 Olympics.

Kate (Moira Kelly), rich figure skater, is too bitchy to keep a partner. As her Russian coach says of the world-class skater, "Before he skate with her, he wear garlic at neck and sleep with cross."

A match made in heaven, or at least in Hollywood.

The Cutting Edge is movie with two plots. One, an ex-hockey player learning how to figure skate. This is good for lots of yuks: Doug asks, "You want my hands where?" as the camera shoots Kate's inner thighs.

To defeat the Unified Team, the couple learns (read: Doug flings her across the rink a lot) an impossibly complicated trick which turns Kate into human nunchucks.

The other plot is opposites attracting. Despite Kate's Harvard alum beau, you know she and Doug will get together because when Kate gives him a New Year's kiss on the cheek, it's in slow mo.

The two plots come together as he professes his love just before they go on in the Olympics. She cries, they almost miss their cue, they decide to do the dangerous centrifugal force move after all, and at the end, when they're frozen in the dip position, she admits she loves him too. They kiss. Aw.

And the sad thing is, I was rooting for them on the ice.

Put me on the list to stop going to see movies with amusing previews and bad-sounding concepts.

—Mara Lee

B-ball comedy addresses social concerns

White Men Can't Jump

Woody Harrelson, Wesley Snipes

directed by Ron Shelton

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Many directors have themes that recur throughout their films — Oliver Stone and the '60s, John Carpenter and isolation.

James Cameron and inner strength. Relative newcomer Ron Shelton now joins this impressive list with his favorite topic, relationships and sports.

Shelton's latest film, *White Men Can't Jump*, like its predecessor, *Bull Durham*, focuses on a relatively obscure sport and a stormy romance. The sport is high-stakes playground basketball, and the romance is between Billy (Woody Harrelson) and Gloria (Rosie Perez).

The film opens with Billy Hoyle arriving at the Venice Beach courts. He challenges local hero Sidney Dean (Wesley Snipes) to a game. Thinking Billy is an average white player, Sidney accepts and is shocked when Billy wins. Sidney realizes that he's been hustled. This gives Sidney an idea,

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Movie

Sidney approaches Billy with a proposal. Working together, they can hustle playground players for a lot of money. Here's the set-up: Sidney goes on the court, runs his mouth, gets everybody mad and then challenges two guys to a two-on-two game, letting them pick his teammate. Billy sits on a nearby bench looking like a chump. Billy is picked to be Sidney's teammate and they win.

This arrangement works perfectly for Sidney, an out-of-work carpenter with a family. Basketball hustling is an easy way for him to make grocery money. Things aren't so good for Billy.

Billy lives with his girlfriend Gloria Clemente. They are both on the run from the Stucci Brothers, to whom they owe \$8,000. Gloria is relying on Billy hustling money while she waits for her dream phone call from Alex Trebek. She studies the almanac, learning useless information like foods that start with "Q," while Billy plays ball. But Billy has a little problem. He can't hold on to money for more than five minutes without betting it on something else.

The film explores the lives of both

men and raises some serious social issues. Writer/director Shelton is making a definite statement about the connection of money and happiness. After they win a big tournament, Sidney and his wife celebrate and seem happy. But after they are robbed and brought back to reality, the short-lived joy that money brings becomes apparent. Gloria sticks with Billy even though he can't hold onto a dollar, but after they strike it rich, she leaves him. Shelton's message is that love is stronger than money.

The topic of racism is also touched on. Billy's basketball abilities are looked down upon simply because he is white. This helps the scheme work. That the three main players are white, black and Hispanic makes a statement about different races living and working together. Although the races constantly interact in the film, no racial tension is shown. In that sense, the film operates in a dream world.

But the whole movie isn't a lecture on romance and legal tender. The film is quite funny in some places, especially the first scene where we meet Sidney, Billy and Junior (Kadeem Hardison). Sidney's sidekick, Hardison's cameo supplies some of the best lines of the film ("I told your momma to act her age and the bitch dropped dead.")

The leads all do fine jobs. It's sur-

prising that after playing *Cheers'* stupid Woody that Harrelson would take a role as someone who wasn't totally competent. But Woody isn't playing Woody here. Billy is confident in his basketball skills and his love skills; he just can't handle money. Wesley Snipes shines in his multi-faceted role of the devoted husband/basketball hero. Snipes has true movie-star potential which shows here.

While some may see *White Men Can't Jump* as a companion piece for *Bull Durham*, it surpasses Shelton's earlier effort. It handles more important topics and the characters are more down to earth. Whereas the baseball scenes in *Bull Durham* were more or less filler, the basketball scenes in *White Men* are impressively choreographed and exciting.

The film has its shortcomings, but at this time of year when people are taking organized basketball far too seriously, this movie is a nice change of pace.

THE RATINGS

- — wait for the video
- — go to the dollar theater
- — only pay matinee price
- — pay full price
- — take your sister, too