



Deborah Cox and Larenz Tate

Love Come Down

2001 101m prod Conquering Lion Pictures, The Film Works, exp Larenz Tate, Victor Solnicki, Pierre René, Robert Baruc, Firdaus J. Kharas, p Eric Jordan, Damon D'Oliveira, Clement Virgo, d/sc Clement Virgo, ph Dylan Macleod, cd Susan Maggi, pd Jennifer Carroll, cos Debra Hanson, sr Paul Adlaf, mus Aaron Davis, John Lang; with Larenz Tate, Deborah Cox, Martin Cummins, Rainbow Sun Francks, Sarah Polley, Jennifer Dale, Kenneth Welsh, Naomi Gaskin, Peter Williams.

From the first moments of *Love Come Down* we understand that brothers, Neville, a black stand-up comic, and Matthew, a white boxer, are each other's keepers. As Neville narrates via his stand-up routine "I'm gonna tell you a fable about two brothers," we know that this film will be a relationship story, a tale/fable of two self-destructive brothers seeking resolution with their troubled past and marred by domestic abuse and the murder of their father. Added to their tragedy is the fact that their white mother is now serving a life sentence for the crime. As a coping method both brothers seek out meaningless escape, Neville through drugs and Matthew through violence.

In the opening scenes, the brothers seem close. They live together and hang in clubs; Neville scoring drugs and Matthew scoring women. Both are ambitious competitors striving to make a name for themselves in their professions. In the midst of this, the brothers pay regular visits to their beloved mother in prison. The meetings are bittersweet, weighed down by regret, guilt and grief. Despite their loyalty, there are feelings of resentment between the brothers. In flashbacks to their childhood, it is Neville, ironically, who proves a talented fighter. This places him in higher regard with their

irresponsible and strange father, leaving Matthew feeling inadequate and unloved. There is resentment felt again when Matthew brings Neville to a Catholic rehab centre and into the angelic arms of Sister Sarah, a former addict turned nun.

Enter Niko, a strong-minded and sultry club singer with whom Neville falls in love. In Niko Neville finds a kindred spirit, a catalyst who's own journey toward resolution and self-discovery is a source of inspiration and hope. Adopted at birth by privileged white Jewish parents, Niko wants to find her birth parents, especially as her adoptive mother is now dying. Niko's search leads her to her real father but also to an unexpected and shocking secret about her real birth mother. This is paralleled in Neville and Matthew's conflict, where, at the centre, there is also a shocking secret about their mother. It is only when Matthew and Neville face this dark secret together that they can put an end to their vicious cycle of co-dependency.

Myth and ritual dominate Clement Virgo's *Love Come Down*. The film is working in the melodrama genre – a genre rooted in mythic structures – where conflict and resolution are played out by archetypes plagued by affliction that is always circumstantial, rather than psychological. It is apt that Virgo frames his story like a fable, as all melodrama has its origins in morality plays and/or folk tales. Like all classic melodramatic characters, Matthew, Neville and Niko struggle through life like "orphans in the storm," aspiring professionally and spiritually beyond their social/economic/psychological landscapes, reminiscent of characters from classic Hollywood adult dramas of the 1950s and '60s. In Neville (Larenz Tate) one is reminded of Frank Sinatra's poker dealer and heroine addict in Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm*. Matthew (Martin Cummins) echoes the pathos of Paul Newman's brooding Rocky Graziano in Robert Wise's *Somebody Up There Likes Me* and Robert Stack's impotent abusive husband in Douglas Sirk's sweeping pre-*Dallas*, *Written on the Wind*. Niko's (Deborah Cox) search for her biological black father and rejection of her adopted white father seems the flip side of *Imitation of Life*, where Sarah-Jane (Susan Kohner), trying to pass as white, searches unsuccessfully for a non-black identity forcing her to reject her real black mother in the process.

Any weakness in the film is in the writing, where character motivations are underdeveloped and conflicts are left unresolved. Again, this might have to do with Virgo's use of mythic and melodramatic structures but certain inconsistencies do, at times, impede the storytelling. For example, the character of Julian (Rainbow Sun Francks), roommate and childhood friend of the brothers, doesn't seem to have a dramatic function. Even though Julian witnesses the murder of the father (Peter Williams) giving him special knowledge of the true identity of the killer, this has no dramatic consequence. When Julian betrays Matthew by sleeping with his girlfriend, Ceanna (Naomi Gaskin), again there is no dramatic consequences or resolution. Matthew isn't angered by this act of betrayal and there is no impact on their friendship. This seems inconsistent for Matthew, a character who has severe anger-management problems. Ceanna also seems to have little dramatic purpose, except to

expose Matthew's dark side, his brutality and womanizing. She's strictly a device, who disappears halfway through the film. Niko's adopted father (Kenneth Welsh) is also underdeveloped and plays like a stereotype, "rich and overprotective daddy." There is little resolution concerning his relationship with Niko, who seems bent on defying and rejecting him. Miraculously, at the end, her adoptive father and biological father appear to be friends. It is as if the emotional storm has simply ended. The orphans are no longer orphans, the afflicted, no longer afflicted. As Sister Sarah (Sarah Polley) repeats almost unemotionally, "God loves you, Neville, God loves you." Like all good Catholics, Neville is a passive receiver, rather than active seeker in his redemption.

Despite some of the weaknesses in the script, the performances are strong, often transcending character flaws. Directing actors is Virgo's strength and talent. Cummins (no relation) is a vulnerable, angry, intense, virile and passionate performer, making a "raging bull" appear human, sad,

remorseful and honourable. Cummins deserved his supporting actor Genie. Tate is equally moving and charismatic. His scenes with Niko are played with honesty and sensual ease. His moments of addiction desperation and longing for connection with his brother are subtle, expressive and truthful. Cox is elegant, intelligent and charming. She makes Niko believable and human. The supporting players are strong here as well, although Polley seems miscast as a worldly addict turned nun. This is not her fault. Sister Sarah is written as a symbol rather than a character.

Virgo's aesthetic is always distinct. His use of light, shadow, colour, tone and rhythm is smart, powerful, sensual and original. In *Love Come Down*, Virgo manages to compensate for story weaknesses with his talent with actors, his richly textured visuals and his unique cinematic vision. Virgo pulls out all the stops here: murder, secret births, jaded lovers, substance abuse, betrayal, sacrificial mothers, deathbed confessions and long-lost fathers. It's deliciously operatic.



KATHLEEN CUMMINS

15 FÉVRIER 1839

2001 115m prod ACPAV, p Bernadette Payeur, Marc Daigle, d/sc Pierre Falardeau, ph Alain Dostie, ed Claude Palardey, pd Jean-Baptiste Tard, c Mario Davignon, s Mathieu Beaudin, Serge Beauchemin, Hans Peter Strobl, mus Jean St-Jacques; with Luc Picard, Sylvie Drapeau, Frédéric Gilles, Jerry Snell, Julien Poulin

In the aftermath of the failed 1837-8 rebellion against England's rule over Quebec, 800 patriots are in the Prison de Montréal. The movie opens on February 14, 1839, the day when leader Marie Thomas Chevalier De Lormier and his comrade-in-arms, Swiss-born rebel Charles Hindelang are told they will hang in 24 hours.

The film portrays the last day in the lives of the two men as they interact with their fellow prisoners. Doomed, the patriots express their fears, discuss French-Canadian servitude (in ways that imply it continues today) and relentlessly insult their military guards ("You're shit," a rebel says in French to an uncomprehending *tête carrée*). Black comic relief is provided when a quack doctor gives the men a mechanical examination and prescribes a useless medication. A guilt-stricken young guard tries to apologize to De Lormier who turns his back on him. The patriots pass the time with games, singing, dancing and their irrepressible joie de vivre.

De Lormier's wife visits him and insists that "Life is what matters, not words." After the two make love, she is dragged away. Despite his love for his wife, De Lormier's resolve is strengthened; he won't grovel for his captors. During a discussion about non-French Canadians in Quebec, one of De Lormier's comrades proclaims, "I don't care if you're white, black, yellow or green. I just want to know if you're on our side. If you are, you're a brother. If you're not, I hate you."

A last-supper sequence features jokes, rousing songs and poetic talk about sex. A kind-hearted priest arrives in the prison to give the men last rites. The next day, as the condemned are led to the gallows, De Lormier clutches his wife's red handkerchief. When he dies, it falls to the hard icy ground on a Quebec winter day.



15 février 1839 time travels to the roots of Pierre Falardeau's chief passion in the movies and life. For the scrappy, unwaveringly grizzled *indépendantiste*, the 19th-century British colonization of French Canada shackled his people to a degrading subservience. Unless they wake up and get off their knees, they will perish.

In his previous films, Falardeau has looked at this urgent matter from multiple, overlapping angles. His 1990 film, *Le Party*, turned a hard-time penitentiary into a obvious metaphor for Quebec's political situation. *15 février 1839* literalizes the incarceration motif of *Le Party*, with its dank, claustrophobic Prison de Montréal setting. The inmates are guilty of no crime other than standing up for their identity. *15 février* also echoes the writer/director's 1994 film, *Octobre*, with the casting of Luc Picard as patriot leader, Chevalier De Lormier. In *Octobre*, Picard appeared as another brooding revolutionary during another crisis in Quebec history as one of the FLQ stalwarts who killed Pierre Laporte.

In addition to these links, the heroic figure of De Lormier embodies all the values that are betrayed by Elvis Graton, Falardeau's most famous creation. The cartoony Graton, a pro-Canada imbecile with an insatiable jones for late Elvis Presley and other consumer goods, was played in three shorts and two features by Julien Poulin, Falardeau's close friend and long-time collaborator. In an allusive bit of casting, Poulin sheds his Elvis persona to appear in *15 février* as a saintly, pro-rebellion priest.

15 février 1839 is Falardeau's dream project, the one obviously meant to be a mystical touchstone that illuminates his other