

# TAKE ONE



Andrew Tarbet and Laia Marull in Richard Roy's *Café Olé*

## Café Olé

2000 92 m prod Ficciones Films, p Pierre Laberge, d Richard Roy, sc Emil Sher, ph Marc Charlebois, ed Jean-François Bergeron, ad Stavros Evangelou, s Normand Mercier, m Michel Rivard; with Andrew Tarbet, Laia Marull, Stephanie Morgenstern, Dino Tavarone, Harry Standjofski, Macha Grenon, Sheena Larkin, Sam Stone, Dorothée Berryman, Jacklin Webb, Eleanor Noble.

*Café Olé* is an immigration love story. Our main protagonist is Malcolm, who is a simple sort of twenty-something native Montrealer who has never felt the need to leave the nest. He works full time at a video store and lives in his own apartment, but is constantly retracing his steps toward independence by returning to his folks, looking after their plants or fixing their garage door while they are away travelling the world. The film recounts his journey to adventure.

We meet Malcolm during the opening credits. He's scribbling down a personal ad, scratching out every second word, desperately searching for the right synonym to catch his soul mate. We quickly learn that he is considered by all those around him to be somewhat of a misfit. He's handsome, tall and square-jawed, but he's never really been with a woman for any amount of time. His problem is idealism, a movie buff who cannot meet a female without comparing her, generally to her disadvantage, to the great ladies of the screen – Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly, Marilyn Monroe or Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Before long, however, his life is turned around. He meets a beguiling Latin creature named Alicia Delgado at a neighbourhood bookstore, a hot 'n' spicy Chilean with a delightfully exotic accent and an alluring gypsy flare. He bumps into her again and again, first at the Mount Royal tam-tams (the camera moves to slow motion as their eyes meet across the crowd; the sound muffles as the music takes over), then at a salsa club where she rules the dance floor with her swirling hips and nimble feet. It turns out she's as enticed by him as he is by her, and they begin an affair.

They're only in the first few hours of their first date when the whole thing begins to crumble. Alicia, we discover, is an illegal refugee, and is being stalked by government men intent on returning her to where she came from. She knows they are on

her heels, and in an attempt to save Malcolm the heartache, tells him to leave her bed without further explanation. He does, but then cannot remain sane and away from her, so he attempts to reconnect. But she is nowhere to be found. Some time later (the next night, it seems) she stumbles drunk into a café where he happens to be. He talks her down, trying to understand what she is telling him in Spanish (the words are simply too painful for her to utter them in English). She is being deported and leaving in two days.

He cannot understand her obvious pain, but agrees to "make her happy" over the next 48 hours. They wine, they dine, they make love, they save an upstairs neighbour from being beaten to death by her husband. While Malcolm is at the hospital caring for the neighbour, who seems to be without any family or friends, Alicia is shipped back to Chile. He returns home to a letter and is heartbroken. However, Alicia has drawn a map of her native neighbourhood on the letter and before we know it, Malcolm conquers his fear of change and hops on a plane. He finds her house in a heartbeat and they frolic until the end of time in the sunny paradise that is her huge house by the sea.

Sarcasm is often a facile critical device, and I do apologize for it, but sitting before my blank screen trying to put into words the impression *Café Olé* left me with, I couldn't find any other appropriate tone. The film starts with promise – its dialogue is tight (reminiscent of smart-youth trendsetters like *The Last Days of Disco* and *Your Friends & Neighbors*), its actors convincing, its original soundtrack melodious – but, ultimately, it unravels into a silly mess.

It's difficult not to like Malcolm (Andrew Tarbet). Tarbet plays him as a nice, ordinary guy with enough of a nerdy streak to explain his social difficulties. He is bright, aware of his own alienating quirks, but resistant to change and handicapped by this resistance. He is sharp-tongued and witty. He's the kind who has a penchant for playing piano for the elderly and tending to his parent's plants. He's a peach. Alicia (Laia Marull) is also a bubbly joy to watch on screen, played charmingly (though perhaps a little too earnestly at times) by Marull as a spontaneous, warm, easygoing girl. Her smile is generous and sincere; the chemistry between her and Malcolm genuine. Her appearance on screen brings with it a surge of Latino-inflected music – composed specially by Québécois

# REVIEWS



Emily Perkins and Katharine Isabelle in John Fawcett's *Ginger Snaps*

chansonnier Michel Rivard – that is used throughout the film. It's a pleasure for the senses. So far so good.

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly where *Café Olé* falls apart, but it's probably somewhere around the couple's first date. Inexplicably the timeline is completely unrealistic. The two meet in a salsa bar, dance the night away, walk slowly back to her place, chat on her back porch, dare each other to jump into a pool below from her second-floor flat, jump in the pool, find their way back inside, make passionate love, talk through the small hours, sleep a little, wake up, pull out a Spanish/English dictionary so Alicia can teach the linguistically challenged Malcolm a few Spanish words (to no avail), and sleep again. But wait. It's not over! Malcolm wakes up to find Alicia fully dressed on her back porch (the sky is still as dark as ever). He jokes around and she tells him to leave. He walks home, meets his upstairs neighbour on the front porch (still dark), chats a while, then, finally, gets to his apartment. The entire sequence takes a good half-hour of screen time, by the end of which you are entirely confused. Only in later dialogue do you gather that, indeed, this is all supposed to have happened under the stars of one, magical night.

All credibility is lost and other revelations strike the viewer as odd. The tall, slim, blond Malcolm has a brother (Harry Standjofski) – not a friend as we'd been led to believe – who is stout, dark-haired, balding and much older. And Alicia, who we've come to know as buoyant and extraverted, is unable even at the most critical moment to gather the courage to tell Malcolm her predicament. Finally – and this perhaps the most striking – once Alicia is forced to return home, her house, in which she seems to live alone, is huge, luxurious and on the seafront, surrounded by land and palm trees. Which leads us to ask: why did she leave in the first place? And if she had to leave, why would she sneak into Canada as an illegal refugee?

No explanation is given by director Richard Roy (who previously directed *Moody Beach*, *Caboose*), who decides, instead, to focus all his energies on telling an elaborate, romantic fable. And though the fable may at times be beautiful and charming, it falls flat and simply can't carry the load.

ISA TOUSIGNANT **TAKE ONE**

## *Ginger Snaps*

2001 107m prod Water Pictures, exp Noah Segal, Alicia Reilly-Larson, Daniel Lyon, p Steve Hoban, Karen Lee Hall, d John Fawcett, sc Karen Walton, ph Thom Best, ed Brett Sullivan, pd Todd Cherniawsky, c Lea Carlson, s David McCallum, mus Michael Shields, creature effects Paul Jones; with Emily Perkins, Katharine Isabelle, Kris Lemeche, Mimi Rogers, Jesse Moss, Danielle Hampton

The movie opens on a suburban neighbourhood. It looks cold and vacant; pets are getting torn to pieces by a vicious wild animal. Brigitte and her older sister, Ginger, hate this place full of dead ends. To cope with it, the burgeoning hipsters stage and photograph gruesome suicide scenes for a school project that celebrates killing yourself as the ultimate "fuck off."

Like Joan of Arc, Brigitte and Ginger are smart teenage girls who have somehow avoided the onset of menstruation. The autumn night that 16-year-old Ginger finally gets her period, she ends up doubly cursed by being attacked and mauled by a werewolf. Soon Ginger finds disturbingly coarse hairs sprouting on her body, has trouble stuffing her emerging tail into her underwear, and develops a sexual energy that gives every misogynist big man on campus a hard-on.

Meanwhile, slouchy, insecure Brigitte starts feeling complex emotions. Jealous, abandoned, worried about the only person in the world she cares about, she warns Ginger: "Something is wrong, like more than you being just female." Pressured into becoming stronger and more assured, Brigitte gets protective, then tries to save her sister from destroying herself without help from their ineffectual baby boomer parents.

When Ginger turns from horny to hyper violent, Brigitte's last hope is Sam, a handsome dope dealer with expertise in biology and lycanthropy. Dracula's Dr. Van Helsing crossed with the Wolf Man's gypsy-wise woman, Sam finds a cure for Ginger. Tragically, he's too late. In a blood-soaked finale, Brigitte, now also infected by the werewolf bug, confronts her sister, who has fully transformed into a howling monster devoid of all human feeling.

A sophisticated attempt at grafting teen angst onto a werewolf tale, *Ginger Snaps* shows off plenty of mood, spirit and shrewd intelligence. Among other themes, the movie covers