

# TAKE ONE

## r.e.v.i.e.w.s

### *Mariages*

2001 95m prod Coop Vidéo de Montréal, Les Productions 23, p/ed Lorraine Dufour, d/sc Catherine Martin, ph Jean-Claude Labrecque, sr Marcel Choinard, s ed Hugo Brochu, ad André-Line Beauparlant, c Sophie Lefebvre, m Robert M. Lepage; with Marie-Ève Bertrand, Guylaine Tremblay, Hélène Loiselle, Mirianne Brûlé, David Boutin, Markita Boies, and Raymond Cloutier.



Marie-Ève Bertrand and Louise de Beaumont

Director Catherine Martin's first dramatic feature, *Mariages*, begins on an empty, 19th-century beach in Quebec where three women are preparing for a late-summer swim. They are family – the youngest is the daughter of the eldest; the third is the eldest's much younger sister – and the repressive tension of their ties is immediately palpable. With the trend of so much of Quebec's cinematic production looming large (we are fond of heavy period pieces in this province, forever looking over our shoulders to dire, high-collared times of rural oppressiveness), what viewers are led to expect on first impression is a tale of darkness and moral foreboding. But what we are given, instead, is a quiet tale of hope, the story of one woman's personal emancipation.

Yvonne is the central character of the film, the sister/aunt of the opening scene. Her mother died when she was young and, for an unexplained reason, has just been exhumed. Though her body has been in the ground for a good 20 years, she is unearthed completely preserved, a gleaming white statue of salt. The villagers are amazed; her body is exposed in the local church for all to see and admire. Surrealism plays an

important part in *Mariages*, and this is just the start. A symbol of survival and the immortality of the human soul, Yvonne's mother's wondrous state serves as a backdrop for the young woman's own self-discovery. Slated by her older sister to enter a nunnery, Yvonne is a free spirit unable to mould herself to the role expected of her, much like, we gather, her mother. She is filled with curiosity, has the maddening habit of wandering off for nude swims in the creek, and exudes a sensuality her family deems threatening.

One day, while Yvonne is in the creek, a man appears. She has time to jump out of the water and into the woods before she is seen, but she stays behind to watch him swim. He is beautiful, and she wants him. The man, promised in marriage to her niece, the 15-year-old seen at the start of the film, is a local lord's son, only just returned from a life at sea. He and Yvonne cross paths fleetingly once or twice. Their passion is reciprocal and unstoppable, and they consummate it, deliciously, after a mock wedding ceremony. Yvonne's sister discovers her transgressions and the man's father rejects his son as a consequence. He leaves, not willing to take Yvonne with him, not willing to risk her future livelihood. So she is left behind, abandoned and pregnant.

So many films would have stopped there. *Mariages*, however, is not about the helplessness of women, the oppressiveness of society or life's moral imperatives. Against the grain, Yvonne goes to her friend, the sage *femme*/nurse/witch, and drinks a concoction that results in an abortion. Locked in her room by her scandalized sister, she smashes the window and steals away in the night. After a stint working in the big city, she returns to the village a year later and lives, hidden, in a shack in the woods. She waits for her lover's return. And return he does. She implores the spirits by performing a voodoo-like ritual involving stones and burning sage, taught her by the sage *femme*, and the next day, after years of patience, an extraordinary gust of wind brings him again to her side. They huddle in the tempest, embrace and the film ends.

David Boutin and Marie-Ève Bertrand



There are moments in life when silence is a purveyor of awe. Unexpected by definition, these moments of exquisite quietness have the eerie ability to strike in the least likely but most needed of situations. In a world of inescapable stimulation, information and provocation, nuggets of respite – the time to contemplate, the luxury of momentarily slowing down and absorbing; the chance to meditate or even simply to catch up to one's speedy existence – are among the sweetest of life's gifts.

*Mariages* is delightfully rife with these riches. Catherine Martin has created in her central character a lover of life's small moments, a creature of rare sensorial sensitivity. Yvonne, played with aplomb by Marie-Ève Bertrand, is profound: her hunger is deep, her determination as bottomless as the pond she so loves. Viewers follow her progression slowly as she bides her time and moves through life confident of the path she is tracing. Privileged to be in her company, we lie with her on the fresh, green moss and watch emerald reeds sway in the wind by her side. We feel the coolness of the water on her

skin, as we do the warmth of flesh brushing against hers – all because we are left the time to do so.

Full of pauses, Martin's film is an exercise in subtlety. The music – viola, prominently – is slow, the editing is minimal; and the camera, when not stationary, pans lazily, allowing us to take in the landscape's breadth. The acting is strong across the board – Yvonne's disapproving sister (Guylaine Tremblay) is fully rounded, only hinting at the tremendous emotional baggage a motherless older sibling would have to carry. The secondary character of Noémie (Markita Boies), Yvonne's father's second wife, is similarly rich; the colour added to the film's tapestry by her consumption-induced dream stories deepens the film's surrealist hue. In fact, the whole narrative of *Mariages* occasionally feels as though it were drifting in and out of slumber or a contemplative, meditative state. The gaps in action are coupled with gaps in realism; yet few films have felt so utterly, refreshingly, real.

Isa Tousignant

TAKE ONE



David Hewlett

## Treed Murray

2001 89m *prod* Treed Murray Productions, *exp* Bryan Gliserman, *Marguerite Pigot*, *p* Helen du Toit, *d/sc* William Phillips, *ph* John Holosko, *ed* Brett Sullivan, *sr* Stephen Barden, *s ed* Bisa Scekic, *Herwig Gayer*, *pd* Diana Magnus, *ad* Dan Horton, *c* Anne Dixon, *m* James McGrath; *with* David Hewlett, Clé Bennett, Kevin Duhaney, Aaron Ashmore, Jessica Greco, Carter Hayden, Julien Richlings.

A yuppy – advertising executive Murray Roberts – freshly scrubbed and in a hurry, takes a shortcut through a city park to a destination unknown. He loses his bearings and is confronted by a young tough, Carter, who demands five dollars for directions. Murray dismisses the wannabe mugger, but Carter won't let him pass without payment. A confrontation

occurs, Carter is knocked down, and the rest of the gang appears. Murray knows he's in trouble and makes a run for it. Like a cornered bear chased by hounds, he climbs a convenient tree, where he is stuck for the rest of the film.

The gang, lead by Shark, an articulate and very talkative bully, at first tries to bring Murray down by climbing the tree, and when this fails, they try to bring him down with stones. Murray, however, proves to be a resourceful and tough opponent and all attempts to dislodge him from his perch fail. So the gang settles in for a long wait. Murray tries submission, bargaining, manipulation – all tools of his trade – in a futile effort to gain his freedom. The gang rummage through his briefcase left on the ground and discover his cell phone and dirty little secrets Murray hides from his pregnant wife, such as his taste for young hookers and illicit drugs.