

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.

The dangerous game of chess continues throughout the night, with Murray and Shark verbally battling for the loyalty of the increasingly fractious gang. Into this mix passes a bloodthirsty band of roving thugs who carry machetes and kill the homeless in the park. Shark's gang of wannabes hide in terror and give the advantage to Murray, who senses he is winning this macho standoff. As the dawn breaks, Shark determines to finish things off and orders Carter to get his father's gun and bring it back to the park. The plan backfires when the gang, instead of shooting Murray, turn on each other, and Carter is accidentally shot. Murray comes down from the tree to attend to Carter's wound while some of the others fetch help.

**T**he strategy of any good, well-planned, low-budget film is to keep the locations to a minimum and the dialogue sharp or funny. The limited locations keep the costs down and good dialogue distracts attention from the fact that the filmmakers can't afford special effects, car crashes or elaborately worked out scenes with lots of extras. First-time feature director William Phillips succeeds on both accounts. *Treed Murray* may not be the most audacious Canadian debut feature to come down the pike since Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Un Zoo la nuit*, but it certainly succeeds in the limited goals it sets for itself and manages at times to be witty, insightful and poignant.

*Treed Murray's* strength lies in its writing, and obviously Phillips has studied classical plot structure. There are three acts broken down into seven scenes. The first act, or set-up, is precisely 15-minutes long. Murray (David Hewlett from *Traders*) enters a park, is confronted by Carter (Kevin Duhaney) and his gang, makes a break from them and climbs a tree. The gang, led by the older Shark (Clé Bennett), makes two futile attempts to bring him down, and then settles into a standoff, for, as Shark says, "as long as it takes." End of act 1.

The second act is broken into four scenes, approximately 10- to 15-minutes a piece. Scene 1 has Murray calling for help and attracting the attention of a bicycle cop, but Shark outsmarts him and the cop rides on. Dwayne (Aaron Ashmore), the silent one in the gang, manages to open Murray's briefcase, revealing his secrets. Murray has hidden a vile of crack cocaine in a bottle of aspirin, and when his cellphone - which is also in his briefcase - rings, another secret unfolds. The only girl in the gang, Kelly (Jessica Greco), answers it and finds herself talking to Murray's wife. Kelly pretends to be his mistress, and from his wife's reaction, it becomes evident to her that her ruse is not far from the truth. Murray has not been faithful. Scene 2 moves the action into the night and the standoff becomes tense. Murray engages in a verbal duel that only provokes the gang into action, and once again they try to climb the tree. This time Carter makes it up to one of the branches, but Murray manages to pin him down and tie him up with his belt. Now Murray has a hostage and the game gets nastier.

Act 2, scene 3 has Murray climbing to the top of the tree to try and attract the attention of a passing helicopter. He falls through the branches, but manages to hang on as Dwayne and KC (Carter Hayden), the fifth gang member, try to pull him down. In the struggle, Carter is left hanging by the neck, and

Kelly, realizing he is choking, pulls Dwayne and KC off Murray. Once back on his perch, he threatens to kill Carter if they don't let him go. But Shark calls his bluff and Carter is released. By now, however, the gang is falling apart and the original determination to get Murray is becoming less intense. Scene 4 introduces a roving gang of bloodthirsty thugs. Once they pass by, Shark's gang reappears after hiding in the bushes. It is apparent that things are not working out the way Shark had planned, and the gang temporarily separates, leaving Carter to guard Murray. Murray, in the act of taking a pee, falls out of the tree, bringing him face to face with Carter, who is put in the difficult position of betraying his friends. The end of act 2 brings the film to its climax.

The denouement has Murray back on his branch and the gang reunited. It is evident that Carter has let them down and things need to be resolved quickly before Shark loses control over his four wannabe muggers. Carter mentions his grandfather's gun, and Shark orders him to get it. Dawn is breaking and soon joggers and the dog people will be in the park. While they are waiting for Carter to return, Murray throws down his coat so Shark can cover Kelly, who is shivering on the park bench. When Carter returns, Kelly and Dwayne vote to let Murray go. KC wants him dead, and Shark passes the gun to Carter. But Carter can't summon up the nerve and instead turns the gun on KC and Shark. In the ensuing struggle he is shot in the shoulder. Murray climbs down to help stop the bleeding, and the game comes to an end on a rather abrupt and sentimental note.

*Treed Murray* succeeds in entertaining because of its carefully thought out classical structure accompanied by some fine performances. Each of the six actors is given choice bits of dialogue and well-rounded characters to work with, although for some reason the part of Dwayne is never fully fleshed out. Shark is perhaps a bit too smart and articulate for a common street thug, but this seems necessary to balance the overly educated and deceitful Murray. Phillips, however, is less successful with his direction, which is no more than competent, and there are no flashes of cinematic style. He keeps it simple, from the wide shots of the park to the close-ups of the gang and Murray. The limited number of action sequences - the stone throwing and the two assaults on the tree - are poorly cut and wisely Phillips keeps them short and falls back on his meticulously crafted script. He is a screenwriting talent to watch.

Paul Townend **TAKE ONE**

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