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'Snow Cake' is compelling film to see

Deborah Nicol

The Desert Sun

May 28, 2007

No two snowflakes are alike, but when they all melt into one puddle, does it matter?

In "Snow Cake," director Marc Evans attempts to forge Angela Pell's story of autism and forgiveness in the stark winter of Wawa, Ontario. Everyone has a secret to spill after the sudden death of a lively young woman, yet the confessions are not worthy of such a tragic accident.

The deceased's mother is a high-functioning autistic woman portrayed by Sigourney Weaver.

Weaver straddles a thin line, expressing herself in a stilted manner that hits extremes with the flip of a switch. The portrayal is understandably difficult, but it lacks a consistent flow of personality.

Some of this can be attributed to a script that is trying to be more poignant than it actually delivers. Weaver's character is meant to be the archetypal simpleton who touches everyone she meets with her straightforward, detached honesty. The woman that encourages sentiment is the one who cannot feel it herself.

But the other characters never fully reach that emotional peak, and Weaver falls into the background merely as a thread that ties together the members and visitors of this prying small town.

Weaver delivers lines that should have been a warning to her when reviewing the dialogue.

The only two solid characters are Alan Rickman's predictably dry accidental tourist and Carrie-Anne Moss's straight-shooting neighbor. Why her character has stayed in the town she so openly disdains is anyone's guess, as well as the question of their circumstantial attraction.

The film wants to be a quirky, thoughtful indie, but the gentle focus of sparse landscapes and carefully chosen soundtrack gives it away too readily. Oh, the places you will go on your way to Winnipeg. The townspeople try to be charmingly annoying, with giant bereavement cookies and paranoid policemen, but in the end they're easily forgotten.

'SNOW CAKE'

Review: ★★

Rated: R

Length: One hour, 52 minutes

Cast: Sigourney Weaver, Alan Rickman, Carrie-Anne Moss

Playing at: Cinemas Palme d'Or

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