John Ritter bounces from woman to woman in Skin Deep

SKIN DEEP
Directed by Blake Edwards.
Starring John Ritter, Alyson Reed, and John C. Reilly.
Now playing at the.

BY CORINNE WAYSHAK

ACRY’S PROMISCUOUS HABITS get in the way of his marriage, career, and sanity in Blake Edwards’ latest film, Skin Deep, an outrageous comedy about a compulsive womanizer. The aging hero (played by John Ritter, of “Three’s Company”) tries to retain his youth by sleeping with younger women, which results in a series of fails, both literally and metaphorically, that eventually lead him down a less philanthropic path. Much like in 10, the serious theme of a man’s struggles to confront incipient middle age lurks beneath the surface of this comedy.

Blake Edwards is well known for his ability to draw the most out of a comic scene, and his treatment of Skin Deep is no exception. One scene, in particular, has an exceptionally erotic and comic sequence. When one of Zach’s many girl friends requests that he wear a condom, but he doesn’t have one handy, she directs him to burn his supply. Zach retreats to the bathroom, and the lights go out. The door soon re-opens, but the only thing that is visible on the screen is a blue glow-in-the-dark condom. Soon the irate husband returns, adding a red glow-in-the-dark condom to the black image. The incident is a “sweet” fight that ensues ended only by both “swords” landing vertically and then limply falling over.

Although it is sexually bold and more comic, Skin Deep has less of the subtlety that 10 has. While George hangs up on his analyst early on in 10, Zach periodically visits his throughout the entire film — allowing a blatantly external unfolding of Zach’s thoughts. Another parallel is that the characters, who both earn their living by some artistic means, experience sexual frustration that interferes with their ability to create. While the link between George’s sexuality and work is never explicitly revealed, Zach, a writer, states at the beginning of Skin Deep, “Not being able to screw is like not being able to write.”

Blake Edwards is very involved in television and often looks to that medium for inspiration and often looks to that medium for inspiration. His collaboration with John Ritter has been a goal for some time now. Ritter’s ability to perform slapstick comedy works well in the film, and Edwards successfully extracts from him a performance of a depth Ritter has never revealed before. But Ritter is unconvincing in the part of a man who is facing a mid-life crisis simply because he looks too young. The energy that make the slapstick so hilarious works against Ritter’s success at playing an older character.

Skin Deep is probably one of Blake Edwards’ funniest movies. Advertised as “The Comedy that Glows in the Dark,” Skin Deep is an eroticly uproaring and entertaining film. Zach’s endless numbers of sexual encounters and the slapstick comedy work well in the film, and Edwards successfully extracts from him a performance of a depth Ritter has never revealed before.

BY ANDREW L. FISH

Lou Reed’s New York is a depressing place, filled with poverty, bigotry, crime, drugs, and pollution. His most political album is like a musical Bonfire of the Vanities, examining people who live in the shadow of what Reed calls “the Statue of Bigotry.”

Although New York is full of figures from the popular culture of 1989, Reed has not commercialized his music for mass consumption. He is not a disc full of Top 40 hits; it is, instead, more in line with his earlier solo works. His distinctive, almost wailing, voice is still there, and there are no electronic gimmicks to hype things up.

Many of Reed’s songs discuss the plight of the city’s vast underclass, living in a world wrecked by the drug trade, racism, and broken homes. “In Romeo Had Juliet,” Reed sings about a young man who has a girlfriend of sorts, and little else. In a typical world filled with gun-toting crack dealers, who also populate his “Dirty Boulevard.” Reed sees a world which dumps the downtrodden into ghettos and sets and abandons them. The poor in New York are trapped by the lure of the drug trade, the lack of parental guidance (“It’s hard to run when a cost hounds bears you on the thighs”), and a city which just doesn’t care.

“There’s no such thing as human rights when you walk the New York streets,” Reed declares. He sings about the casualties of the drug trade, but seems to feel there is no way to turn things around. This fatalism is prevalent throughout the album, tempered only by his look to the future in “There is No Time.” Even when Reed sings of needing a “Busload of Faith,” it is only because “you can depend on the worst always happening.”

The best track on New York does not concern itself with the poor, but rather with a deeper combination of racism, gun control, and environmental concerns. “Last Great American Whale” is a ballad about a mythical creature who came to the rescue of an Indian chief, who was killed for killing a racist youth. The whale saves the chief and stops the racism (“the whites drowned, blacks and reds set free”). But the great animal was then killed by a NRA member, who had been aiming for the chief. This is taken as a symbol of Americans lack of concern for the environment (They’ll watch dead rats wash up on the beach and complain if they can’t swim”). “Last Great American Whale” definitely contains Reed’s most creative lyrics, and it provides an excellent bridge between the problems of the city and the country as a whole.

New York is not without humor. In “Sick of You,” pollution makes the ocean a red sea, but there is no one to part it. The song moves on to talk about hyperdermic needles in cabbage, the marriage of Oliver North and Wayne Secord, and a radioactive trucker appearing on the Mona Downey Jr. Show. This song offers a more lighthearted look at the problems of pollution and corruption; it complements the album’s more serious lyrics.

Reed also takes time to attack the Pope for his meeting with American President Ronald Reagan. Reed sings of needing a “Busload of Faith,” it is only because “you can depend on the worst always happening.”

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FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 1989
The Tech PAGE 7

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