

Foreign film review

Ponette

BY DAVID MACDONALD

Ponette is a recent release that deals in great detail with the emotions of a four-year old child dealing with the death of her mother in a car accident. What is most impressive, if perhaps a bit unnerving to some viewers, is to see someone so young perform with seeming ease and who somehow is able to stand such grief as written in the screenplay.

The movie begins as Ponette recovers from the accident with a broken arm, and as the father takes her out for a drive and then admits to her that her mother has died. This sets off a search for some sort of understanding and closure for this girl.

The movie gives us many instances of how a child's undeveloped sense of reality creates problems. For example, in order to make Ponette feel happy, a relative tells her the story of Jesus' resurrection, which leads Ponette to believe that if Jesus can make himself alive again, so can her mom. Religion plays a major part in the film, as later on at her school, she meets up with another four-year old girl who insists she is a child of God and who puts Ponette through a series of "tests" (like jumping off a 20-cm bench to prove your courage) which would enable Ponette to contact God and to let Him be a mediator between her and her mom. But Ponette only wants to speak to her mother, and later on she prays to God to let her speak to her mom again. Ponette's simple words and her crying convey much in the terror she feels at this loss.

Scenes like this are tough to watch without getting at least a little like wanting to cry. It is quite hard to see Ponette cry and do everything she possibly can to see her mom again --- especially in the final sequence when she runs away to the graveyard and actually starts digging her little hands into the dirt in order to reach her mother. This sets up the resolution, which some critics have called the only flaw of the movie, but which at least gives a closure to Ponette's quest.

A few critics have actually said that because the movie dealt solely with the children's feelings without giving us an adult perspective it got boring after a while. Rubbish. It's about a child's obviously naive, childlike mind dealing with a grim, adult subject; adults are not the point.

This film is certainly more involving than some of the other movies I've talked about, which were interesting but didn't completely move me in the same way, which this one certainly did. Like I said, there are many sad scenes which are hard to watch, and if you are not in the least bit touched by the story, then you must have a heart of stone.

Rating: *** 1/2

Note: a copy of this film is available at Blockbuster.

5 foot 9 and bullet proof

Baba's Lounge
February 14, 1998

For the few and the proud not shackled to the stigma of Valentine's Day clichés, there was still love to be felt in the form of a cozy and casual concert at Baba's, introducing Charlottetown to Halifax's 5 foot 9.

Fronted by Shannon Cunningham's rich, earthy voice, the foursome soothed the hearts of the listeners for three sets. Guitarist Lisa MacKenzie provided some harmonious harmony while Benn Ross maximized a minimalist drum kit. Henri Sangalang proved his musicianship with some quick adaptability when a little amp trouble left his bass silent.

The band seemed to appreciate the superhuman focusing abilities of Islanders. After Cunningham remarked upon this, Bill Matthews, fan, enthusiastically exclaimed, "three cheers for focus." The emotional, transcendental union of musician and audience had been achieved at this very point. It was so sweet that the ambience made Hello Kitty look like a Hell's Angel.

Some of the many fine moments of the evening include a frisky song on the topic of regretting rejection, accentuated by some fine auxillary percussion (beer bottle), lilting slide whistle solos, and plenty of "arriba" esque exotica. More tender sounds emanated from "Pathos" and "If you were here."

"This was the best Valentine's day ever," remarked one departing, lovelorn soul.

