

A song is heard:
*My child is my mother returning.
 Her mother my daughter same.
 She carries a soul in her yearning
 Of sorrow, of peace and of pain.*

As salt tears welled up in solidarity, my sympathetic heart started to beat sideways. I switched off the video, took a shower and dressed quickly. I left the screening room-hotel suite just in time to greet a smiling friend floating out of an elevator. I started to share the film with her. You would do the same.

Peter Wintonick •

LIFE CLASSES prod. man. Terry Greenlaw asst. d. Gordon Parsons loc. man. Gary Swin cont. Ken Pittman cast. d. Nicola Lipman 2nd asst. d. Paula Musial 3rd a.d. Leslie Jones prod. off. coord David Craig books Bonnie Baker unit pub. Eric Walker stills David Middleton. Eric Walker art d. Mary Steckle set dress. Angela Murphy key props Monique Desnoyers asst. set dress props David Coole ward Janice Rogers d.o.p. Lionel Simmons 1st asst. cam. Dominique Gusset 2nd asst. cam. David Middleton gaffer Charles Lapp key grip No Fooling Emery grip Alan P. Macleod best boy (Halifax) Michael Ruggles best boy (Cape Breton) Gary Whitehouse sd. rec. Jim Rillie boom Alex Salter sc. consult Jean Pierre Lefebvre ed. William D. MacGillivray asst. ed. Terry Greenlaw neg. cutter Erika Wolff sup. sd. ed. Les Halman chief sd. ed. Angela Baker dialogue ed. Alex Salter add. dialogue eds. Jane Porter, Eric Emery sd. fx. ed. Alex Salter m. ed. William D. MacGillivray asst. m. ed. Dominique Gusset add. m. ed. Claire Henry post sync. fx Art McKay re-rec Film House Group mix Mike Hoogenboom. Marvin Bern. Brent Macleod m. rec. Solar Audio and Rec. Ltd. video coord. Tim Reed prod. assts Robin Sarafinchan, Carla Densmore. Jess MacGillivray projectionists David Middleton, Alex Busby, Dan Gowan crafts Lorette Leblanc loc. catering Kabuki Catering paramedic Dave Smith chaperones Bernice and Amare Chatt. Mira Chatt. Myrna Yazer gaelic coach Tina Morrison german trans Christiana Graham trans. of "Mary's Lament" Norman Macdonald Miss Lipmann's hair Jacques of "Blades". Halifax. N.S. "Life Classes" score composed by Alexander Tilley. based on a theme by William D. MacGillivray m. oboe Suzanne Lemieux violin Anne Rapson. Burth Wath cello Shimon Watt voices Kim Bishop. Karen Conrad. Doris Mason. Jennifer Quinn "Who Was the One" by Marty Reno and William D. MacGillivray. performed by Marty Reno. special thanks to Audrey Cole, Cordell Wynne, Wayne Cormier, Les Halman, Ron Keough, The People of Ingonish, Cape Breton, Atlantic Filmmakers' Cooperative, Africville Genealogical Society, Toshiba of Canada Limited, Oland Breweries Limited, Nova Scotia Department of Education Media Services, C.B.C. Television, Halifax, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and its Faculty, Staff and Students add. Thanks to Gordon and Stella Hardy, Keith Roper, Murray Stockley, Dr. & Mrs Paul Ecker, Claude MacInnis, Dorothy Jackson, Susan McIntyre, Jim Dunphy, Mr & Mrs Allan Henderson, Dean Brosseau, Camille's Fish and Chips, John Benalands, Peter Macdonald, Irvine Carvery, Chuck Clark, Claire Henry, Paul Mitchellree, Dorothy Reynolds, Mary Reynolds, Marie Jamison Fitzgerald, Phillip Walling, John Silver, Cilla Rickard, St. Joseph's Daycare, The Cohn, Dalhousie Arts Centre, Dalhousie Theatre Department, Canada Employment Centre, Images East, Parks Canada, Cape Breton Baddeck Satellite Systems, Metropolitan Transit Commission, Grand Pre Wines, Millie's Chips, Nova Scotia Oilers, United Book Store Limited Lab Film House Group, opticals Film Effects titles Meta Media d./sc./exec. p. William D. MacGillivray p. Stephen Reynolds J.p. Trudi Peterson, Jane Purves, Jacinta Cormier, Leon Dubinsky, Marty Reno, Evelyn Garbary, Monique Blais, Anne Marie MacDougall, Karen Shea, Steve Szewczok, Kelly Edwards, Derek Briand, Shane Briand, Sharnus Cox, Leo Jessome, Paul Ratchford, Jill Chatt, Mary Izzard, Caitlyn Colquhoun, Ruth Owen, Sigrun Zibara, Marc St Pierre, Eleanor Dorrington, Frances Knickle, Ron Gerald, Susan Saunders, Miriam MacMaster, Julie MacMaster, Jeremy Ackerman, Charlotte W. Hammond, Sandra Millott, Elizabeth Berlasso, Kathi Thimpson, Mark Cowden, Ann Seymour, Jennifer Tilley, Suzanne McCarthy, Christopher Joyce, Mark Richards, Bonnie Baker, Ken Robinson, Thea Wilson Hammond, Louise Holloway, Steven Arnold, Ron Wakary, Angela Aole, Brian Clements, Glen Gibson, Charlotte Hunt, Andrea Jackson, Astrid Brunner, Barbara Nicholson, Paul Greywall, Troy McCann, Kim McCarthy, Aletha Mantley, Ida Donovan, Kent Stetson, Nicola Lipman, Steve Miller, Geoff Harrington, Dave MacIsaac, Don Palmer, Bruce Jacobs, Pauls Simons, Terry Greenlaw, James Nicolson, Carol Millett, Tim Reed, Paula Musial, Angela Murphy, Monique Desnoyers, Jeff Semple, Barry Fraser, Rachel Brodie, John Stevenson, Holly Rowland, James Paul, Charles Crocher, Eric Walker, Rachel Linely, Tina Morrison **Mary Cameron's drawings** by Charlotte Wilson Hammond p. William MacGillivray. Picture Plant dist. Cinephile Ltd. coul. 16 mm. running time 117 min.

Patricia Rozema's
**I've Heard
 The
 Mermaids
 Singing**

Hype thrives on incomplete information; we were all more excited, more hopeful about *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* when none of us had seen it. Now that it's opened in parts of Canada, away from the giddy atmosphere of any festival, away from the sound of fans screaming praises loud enough for the buyers to hear, the process of clear-eyed appraisal can begin. And though the film is not likely to garner scores of standing ovations here, neither is it nearly so trivial as some have begun to claim. *Mermaids* (the title is from T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*) is urban fantasy with a light touch, more significant for its presence and its success that important in itself. It's a nice film.

Which is not to disparage Rozema's accomplishment. "Nice" is what the film wants to be, and gentle and whimsical and quirky and the rest of it. As such, *Mermaids* is a gem. It may sometimes leave you wishing it had more bite, but if you're not looking for bite you'll never be disappointed.

Sheila McCarthy (looking a lot like Shirley MacLaine before she discovered the cosmos) plays Polly Vandersma. Polly is a wideeyed, scattered "person friday" who receives a placement as an assistant to the curator of a small gallery and (prat) falls into the hard-edged, downtown art scene. There she discovers both the magic and duplicity of the art industry; in the end she shakes things up merely with the power of her innocence. Polly's sensitive nature is forced to commute between her private dream world and the mercenary cult of contemporary art. The two worlds eventually, inevitably collide.

Rozema blends satire and fantasy in the film, sometimes sending up the orthodoxies of organized art, sometimes leaping into Polly's black and white daydreams — the only place where a hapless "temp" can conquer her environment (and defy a few laws of physics). Never mind that the satire is rather tame and the fantasy sometimes excessive. Never mind that its art as religion subtext is neither original nor profound — at least it's never ponderous. *Mermaids* is a film that succeeds on its charm; when it makes a false move you tend to give it the benefit of the doubt. It's at once clever and sincere, two things that keep it from getting mired in the cute. And of course there's always McCarthy's performance to watch. She has it all down — the ties, the ever-ready embarrassed look, the hair.

Somewhere between J. Alfred Prufrock and Pee Wee Herman lies Polly Vandersma. "Vandersma," incidentally, is perhaps the first Dutch in-joke in a Canadian feature film: it yokes together a common Dutch prefix and suffix with nothing in between — something like McSon. And so it seems Polly is intended as an everywoman character. She is naive-



• Sheila McCarthy doing "loveable" in *Mermaids*

ete embodied, a walking signifier of sincere ignorance. And when sophistication wears the face of the urban art world, naivete can be counted a virtue. But although she shares Pee Wee's childlike self-absorption (and a scaled-down version of his bicycle), Polly is not nearly so anarchic, nor so annoying as Pee Wee. She actually wants to fit in, to be thought competent.

For most of its 81 minutes the film is a delight to watch, though there are some glaring problems. One scene, set in a Japanese restaurant where Polly makes the mistake of ordering octopus, is particularly uncomfortable to watch, not just because it doesn't work dramatically, but because it seems to ask us to laugh at the fact that anyone could eat such a thing. And Polly's crush on the lesbian curator of the gallery (Paule Baillargeon) seems somehow unresolved. "I know love is a pretty strong word when you're talking about another woman and she's not your mother," Polly admits. Then she just gets over it. But it's the ending of *Mermaids* that is most disappointing. The last few minutes completely upset the balance between fantasy and real-world concerns that had been so delicately negotiated throughout the film.

Mermaids does look beautiful, though, a credit to Rozema and cinematographer Douglas Koch. It comes as no surprise that Koch has shot a number of music videos — the fantasy sequences show all the hallmarks — but there's very little empty flash in *Mermaids*. The tinted black and white sequences in particular have a quality impressive for such a low-budget film.

Rozema has managed to capture the vertigo and the bliss of the outsider in *Mermaids*. Polly Vandersma, no one in particular (and hence everyone), stands outside the artworld, outside the very idea of lesbianism, outside the city she takes such joy in photographing. In her rare moments of repose, when she hasn't gone and messed something up again, she exists in a state of wry wonder. The constant comment, "Isn't life the strangest thing you've ever seen?" keeps her sane, or as sane as she chooses to be.

Rozema has a real sensitivity to Polly's glorious solitude — at its best, *Mermaids* makes you believe in the secret power of the unhip.

Now that the noise from Cannes has subsided, *Mermaids* should be able to shed the role of Telefilm's best billboard and bask in some real-world success. Somehow it's fitting that a film so willing to believe in those unfashionable ideals we all sneer at — beauty and truth, for example — should have been blessed with such a fairytale reception. Sometimes, even in the wicked, heartless film industry, the virtuous are rewarded. Strangest thing I've ever seen.

Cameron Bailey •

I'VE HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING d./orig. sc. Patricia Rozema p. Patricia Rozema. Alexandra Raffé exec. p. Don Haig 1st a.d. John Pace 2nd. ass. Arlene Hazzan 2nd. second Thomas Quinn cont. Louise Shekter gen. Wojtek Kozlinski Jolynn Somerville, Debbie Honsberger, Frank Foria d.o.p. Douglas Koch cam asst. Durv in Partridge. Gavin Coford Polly's photos and prod. stills Debra Friedman loc. sd. Gordon Thompson. Michele Moses gaffer David Owen best boy Edward Mikouc elec. Anthony Ramsey. Neil Stroud grips Blake Ballentine, Greg Palermo, Dennis Kane art d. Valanne Ridgeway asst. Jake Fry art consult Carla Garnet props Peter Miskimmin surveillance sculpt. Peter Dykhuis artists John Abrams, Michael Merrill, Dyan Marie make-up/ hair Stephen Lynch hair consult Lyle Issett orig. ward. des. Martine Matthews, Alexandra Z. ward co-ord Beth Pasternak ed. Patricia Rozema asst. Michael Weth consult ed. Ron Sanders Rushes sync. Lenka Holubec sd. ed. Steven Munro asst. Alexandra Raffé re-rec. mix. Egidio Coccimiglio Foley rec. James Musselman m. Mark Korven m. co-ord. John Switzer m. rec. and mix. Jeff Wolpert asst. David Stinson, Michael Haas fairlight programmer Rob Yale mermaids voices Rebecca Jenkins prod. man. Alexandra Raffé daily crew John Switzer, Ted Quinn, Andreas Trautsmansdorff, Victor Roberts, Theresa Burke, Kat Hellyer, Suzie Schlanger, loc. sc. Cellophane Idea, Michelle Pelchat stunts consult. Dwayne MacLean casting Mary Armstrong CSC, Ross Clysdale CSC extras casting Lewis Casting timer Chris Hinton sd. transfers Multitrack mix Film House opticals Film Optical neg. cut. Francont Film titles Meta Media. music "Open Window" by Mark Corven, courtesy of Duke Street Records, "Symphonie No. 5" by Ludwig Von Beethoven, courtesy of Chris Stone Audio, "Viens, Malike, les lianes en fleurs, from "Lakme" by Leo Delibes, courtesy of Pathe Marconi. Produced with the financial participation of Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council, National Film Board (PAFFPS), Ontario Film Development Corporation, Telefilm Canada dist. Cinephile Ltd Int. sales Films Transit Inc I.p. Sheila McCarthy, Paule Baillargeon, Ann-Marie McDonald, John Evans, Brenda Kamino, Richard Monette. colour 35mm running time 81 min.