



Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

Exotica

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Director: Atom Egoyan

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An Ego Film Arts production

Produced with the participation of: Téléfilm

Canada, Ontario Media Development Corporation

Presented by:

Alliance Communications Corporation

Producers: Camelia Frieberg, Atom Egoyan

Associate Producer: David Webb

Production Manager: Sandra Cunningham

Production Co-ordinator: Roland W. Schlimme

Production Accountant: Shirley Granger

Location Manager: Victoria Harding

Assistant Director: David Webb

2nd Assistant Director: Fergus Barnes

3rd Assistant Director: Michele Rakich

Script Supervisor: Joanne Harwood

Extras Casting: Scott Mansfield

Writer: Atom Egoyan

Director of Photography: Paul Sarossy

2nd Unit Camera: Mark Willis

Steadicam Operator: David Crone

Focus Pullers: David Plank, Paul Boucher

Clapper Loader: Reni Hoz

Gaffer: David Owen

Key Grip: Cynthia Barlow

Still Photographer: Johnnie Eisen

Special Effects Supervisor: Michael Kavonaugh

Editor: Susan Shipton

1st Assistant Editor: Paul Shikata

2nd Assistant Editor: Wiebke Von Carollsfeld

Production Designers: Linda Del Rosario,

Richard Paris

Assistant Art Director: Kathleen Climie

Lead Set Dressers: Doug McCullough, Brent Kelly

Set Dressers: Linda Del Rosario, Richard Paris,

Garth Brunt

Props: Peter Miskimmin

Construction: Terry Hess, Art Verhoeven

Costume Designer: Linda Muir

Wardrobe Mistress: Sydney Sproule

Make-up Artist: Nicole Demers

Tattoo Artist: Alison Ethier

Hair Design: Debra Johnson

Title Design: Greg Van Alstyne

Film Titles: Film Opticals of Canada

Negative Cutting: Franco Films

Film Timer (Medallion/PFA): Chris Hinton

Music: Mychael Danna

Digital [Music] Editor: Paul Intson

Music Mixer: David Bottrill

Recording Engineer (Bombay): Gaurav Chopra

Dance Choreographer: Claudia Moore

Sound Design: Steven Munro

Sound Recordist: Ross Redfern

Boom Operator: Peter Melnychuk

Re-recording Mixers: Daniel Pellerin, Peter Kelly

Re-recording Mixer (Film House): Keith Elliott

Dialogue Editor: Sue Conley

ADR Editor: Peter Winninger

Foley Artist: Andy Malcolm

Foley Recordist: Tony Van Den Akker

Stunt Co-ordinator: Ted Hanlon

Unit Publicist: Simone Urdl

Cast:

Bruce Greenwood (Francis Brown)

Mia Kirshner (Christina)

Don McKellar (Thomas Pinto)

Sarah Polley (Tracey Brown)

Victor Garber (Harold Brown)

David Hemblen (inspector)

Peter Krantz (man in taxi)

‘What is a cult film? A cult film is one which has a passionate following but does not appeal to everybody. Just because a movie is a cult movie does not automatically guarantee quality. Some cult films are very bad. Others are very, very good. Some make an awful lot of money at the box office. Others make no money at all. Some are considered quality films. Others are exploitation.’ From 1988 to 2000 *Moviedrome* was presented by Alex Cox and then Mark Cousins. Across that time, more than 200 features were shown, and generations of movie fans and filmmakers would be informed and inspired by the selection, alongside the wit and wisdom of the introductions that preceded each screening. *Moviedrome* was a portal into the world of weird and wonderful cinema. This two-month season features some of the most notable titles screened and wherever possible they are preceded by the original televised introduction.

Nick Freand Jones, season curator and producer of *Moviedrome*

Mark Cousins: This screening of *Exotica* is the network premiere of one of the most talked about independent movies of the decade. Its director Atom Egoyan started with experimental films. This year he won the Grand Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *The Sweet Hereafter*. The first thing you see in *Exotica* is a slow panning shot across hothouse plants. A lot of the action of the film takes place in the Exotica sex club in Toronto in which artificial palm trees grow and girls lap dance like jungle birds. The atmosphere in the club is humid. The workers watch the sad male clients from behind glass.

What struck people about this bold, cool Canadian film when it came out three years ago was how completely the director Atom Egoyan created his dense, hot, humid environment. He mastered the mood of the film. He gave you a real sense that the besuited men who watch the girls dance are mired in their own guilt and distant erotic desires.

One of the rules of the club, and this becomes part of the plot, is that the men do not touch the girls. The emotions in the film are also at arms length, until that is they become unbearable. For me the star of the film is Elias Koteas who plays the announcer of the club whose haunting monotone delivery expresses the fantasies that the clients dare not admit to. Koteas almost whispers these desires. He also stars in David Cronenberg’s ‘sex and cars’ movie *Crash*, which was all over the tabloids earlier this year. In that film too he is seedy and sublime, a kind of joyless slave to an intense erotic imagination. I cannot think of any actor quite like him.

There is so much mastery in this picture – it digs so deep into the dark side of people – that a friend of mine compares it to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*. And yet I confess that I hate *Exotica*. Right from the first shot I mentioned it pushes me away from it. I have tried to work out why and I think it has to do with the fact that for me life simply does not feel like a jungle. I think the world is open and unknowable and Atom Egoyan feels that it is claustrophobic and inward. See what you think...

Mark Cousins’ original introduction for *Moviedrome*. With thanks to moviedrome.tumblr.com

Arsinée Khanjian (*Zoe*)
Elias Koteas (*Eric*)
Calvin Green (*customs officer*)
Damon D'Oliveira (*man at opera*)
Jack Blum (*scalper*)
Billy Merasty (*man at opera*)
Ken McDougall (*doorman*)
Maury Chaykin, C.J. Fidler, Nadine Ramkisson
(*Exotica Club clients*) *
Canada 1994©
104 mins
35mm

* Uncredited

The screening on Wed 30 Jul will include a
pre-recorded intro by filmmaker Atom Egoyan

Moviedrome transmission date: 29 June 1997

With thanks to

Bob Cummins and Sharon Maitland

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A contemporary review

Atom Egoyan returns on magnificent form to the themes he knows and loves: sex, love, relationships and the voyeuristic nature of all of these. Where his last film, *Calendar*, emphasised the most anal aspects of his obsessions, this sympathetic group piece is far more relaxed and much more enjoyable and intriguing for it. Almost every member of this group mythologises who and where they are through play acting and ritual. Zoe plays the part of dispassionate matriarch. Christina is crystallised into the schoolgirl she acts onstage. Francis turns his mourning for his dead daughter into a fetishistic, psychosexual relationship through Christina's striptease character. Thomas, a pet shop owner, would rather see himself as a smuggler of exotic goods.

In keeping with the 'look but don't touch' maxim of the club *Exotica*, the characters are all alienated by their personas: Eric and Zoe, both obsessed with Christina, content themselves with watching her through secret windows; Francis can only look at Christina dancing – even his memories of his wife and daughter are video images. And Thomas on his first, tentative trips to the opera can only sit next to the men he picks up, but cannot take them home. Egoyan skilfully weaves voyeurism deep into the film: there are mirrors everywhere, from the club's spyholes to Thomas' glass tanks to the two-way customs official's mirror. Voyeurism, the watchword of Egoyan's postmodern world, is a symbol of both aloneness and a strange kind of togetherness. The watchers collaborate in their spying, and are finally bound together not through love but through another's transgression (the murder of a child) in the past.

They turn out, in fact, to be members of a complicated, oedipally disrupted 'family' with Zoe, Eric and Francis all as symbolic parents/lovers to Christina. Family metaphors run even deeper: Zoe and Eric are about to parent a child; Eric and Christina meet while seeking a (dead) child. Even Thomas is nesting his macaw eggs. Egoyan's avowed desire for *Exotica* to unfold like a striptease, with every scene revealing just a little bit more, turns the audience, too, into tantalised voyeurs. Characters enter the film enigmatically, leading us to guess at their roles and identities, and to construct our own scenarios. (Who do we think Tracey is when we first see Francis take her home and hand her money? A child prostitute? A girlfriend?) But this is not just the director at his most brilliantly perverse, for *Exotica's* game-playing is also fleshed out with real human sympathy. Francis, for example, trapped in an incestuous fantasy, is also seen in another relationship as a kindly, rather philosophical uncle. The brooding, almost satanic Eric is recalled as a fresh-faced, more optimistic student, capable of selflessness.

The film's playful teasing is not confined to its characters. The variously 'exotic' settings have the same effect, whether they be the club, where disco is replaced by Leonard Cohen as striptease music, Thomas' subterranean-inspired pet shop, or the colourful chaos of Harold's place ('exotic' birds loom large in all locations). It is only from the moment of Christina's explanation of Francis' past to Thomas, achieved with the flourish of a detective announcing his denouement, that *Exotica* starts to lose its ingenious, languorous way. The film then seems to redirect its energy towards tidying up loose ends. But perhaps this is only one more metaphor – mirroring the way in which the titillation of the striptease can be more exciting than its final, naked flourish.

Amanda Lipman, *Sight and Sound*, May 1995