

WVXU Views and Reviews

Movie Reviews

Local Color

Alla Prima Productions

Now Showing at: Cincinnati World Cinema September 8-9 Rated R

Review by: Larry Thomas

We've all seen the coming-of-age films in which a teenage boy looks for direction with his passion in life, clashes with his family, then finds his way. Generally, though, the young man wants to be a writer, or a rock star, or a racecar driver. **Rarely is the film made in which the protagonist wants to be an artist. Such is the case with *Local Color*; a small, low-budget independent film that not only looks and sounds good, but also has the participation of an impressive cast.**



John lives in New Jersey, 1974. He lives, eats, and breathes art, much to the dismay of his blue-collar father, and the endless chiding of his peers. When he discovers that a famous Russian painter lives in their town, John approaches him as both a fan and a student. As you might expect, their first meetings are like oil and water. But the aging artist eventually relents, and takes John along to his summer home in Pennsylvania for art...and life...lessons.

Many plot points may feel as if they are being telegraphed way in advance, but when the payoff comes, it's something completely different. At times, the script and characters seem overly sentimental, until a great scene in which the old artist talks about "what's wrong with being sentimental" diffuses that whole argument.

Written and directed by George Gallo, who is also an artist, *Local Color* constantly sets you up for a cliché, only to deliver something fresh. **The film seems talky, until you realize the characters are actually talking about ideas... ideas that make you think.**

The great German actor Armin Mueller-Stahl, who first gained attention in this country from his work with director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, gives a wonderful performance as Nicolai Seroff, the Russian artist. He's proud and profane, drinks way too much, and is completely disillusioned with humanity. Trevor Morgan, whom I've not seen before, is just fine in the role, plays John. He's charming and has enough range to stand his own against the veteran thespian. His character is based on Gallo's experiences growing up.

In smaller roles along the way are Ray Liotta and Diana Scarwid as John's parents. The terrific Samantha Mathis, who was so good in 90s films like *Pump Up the Volume* and *Broken Arrow* has a pivotal role as Nicolai's friend in Pennsylvania, while venerable Charles Durning has a couple of scenes too. The real surprise is Ron Perlman, *Hellboy* himself, as a pretentious art dealer, and it's a delightful performance.

The R-rated *Local Color* is the kind of film that never finds wide distribution because it doesn't appeal to current day commercial audiences. But **it's well-worth discovering for yourself, to experience the ideas, feelings, and humanity that these actors and filmmakers bring to the screen.** It's showing at 7:30 pm Tuesday and Wednesday at the Carnegie Arts Center in Covington, and is a presentation of Cincinnati World Cinema. There are local artists lined up to conduct the post-film discussions each evening, and a social hour and cash bar begins at 6:30.