

Philip Martin

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

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"... an impressively tough look at adolescence. Tim is a terrific character, a kid who could go either way — he could become a sociopath or a poet. (Or, one supposes, a poetic sociopath.) ... In the end, [Hall] delivers an intense, arresting film that doesn't always take the easiest way out."

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Film clips

No juvenile film

Delinquent's roughness is part of its charm

BY PHILIP MARTIN
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First of all, let's acknowledge that we hold small, independent "art" films like Peter Hall's *Delinquent* to a different standard than well-financed Hollywood projects.

A small film like this is liable to look raw, rough and unfinished when compared with the blockbuster in the next theater. It's hard to keep up production values on a minuscule budget. While some independent filmmakers — like Henry Jaglom or Kevin Smith — are able to fashion a virtue from the grainy, underlit look associated with little movies, audiences used to Hollywood-grade product might perceive *Delinquent* as amateurish.

And perhaps it is amateurish — in the sense that it is obviously the work of an intelligence that loves the form. Hall, a former journalist and multimedia concert producer who not only directed *Delinquent* but wrote and produced it, seems excited by cinematic possibilities and nearly makes up in imagination what he lacks in technical exper-

tise. There is a moment near the beginning of the film when Hall's camera catches his young "star" — the yet-to-be-discovered Desmond Devenish — through what we don't quite recognize as a screened window. The subtle lattice looks, for just a moment, like it could be the dot pattern of a television screen.

Coming as it does before things really get under way, this is a moment of delicious misdirection. For a second, the confusion seems deliberate — and perhaps it is. Unfortunately, Hall otherwise displays very little of what we might call visual style, preferring to proceed in a conventional, straightforward manner, trusting that his narrative is enough to hold our interest. And it almost is.

Hall is savvy enough not to tell us everything about his 15-year-old protagonist, Tim (Devenish), who is apparently a newcomer having trouble adjusting to the upscale New York village of Cold Mills. Tim's mother killed herself a few months before, and he now lives in a squalid trailer with his brutal,

Film review

Delinquent Grade: B

Cast: Desmond Devenish, Shawn Batton, Jeff Paul, Ian Easton, Marisa Townsend
Director: Peter Hall
Rated: Not rated; contains violence, mild profanity and sexually suggestive scenes
Running time: 84 minutes
Playing: Wynsong 10

tightly wound father, Ben (Jeff Paul) — a small-town cowboy cop.

Ben is a tough-talking, hard-drinking "disciplinarian" who is afraid that his son's recent scholastic and unspecified other troubles — we find out he's been an excellent student at his old school — might hurt his chances for one day becoming police chief.

As it happens, Ben has reason to worry. Tim has taken to breaking into an empty summer home, rummaging through the absentee owners' belongings. He finds a videotape revealing that Tracy

(Shawn Batton), the pretty young daughter of the home's owners, is carrying on an affair with one of her boarding school teachers. Tim also takes some pills he finds there (turns out they're the same kind his mother overdosed on), fiddles with a pistol and tries on some of Tracy's lingerie.

Like Goldilocks, he even falls asleep in Tracy's bed. He steals only her copy of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Meanwhile, Tracy is suffering her own tribulations; she ends up pregnant and frozen out by her now-fearful lover. She, too, seeks refuge in the summer house that Tim has taken for his own.

On balance, *Delinquent* announces the arrival of several talents. As Tim, Devenish is utterly unaffected and natural; a gawky boy beset on all sides. And Batton is either perfectly cast or a simply wonderful actor — she exudes a certain thick-limbed vulnerability that suggests both an acquaintanceship with privilege and starry-eyed self-deception.

And while Hall is not as good a writer as he is a storyteller — both of the main actors are better than some of the lines they are called on to recite — he has crafted an impressively tough look at adolescence. Tim is a terrific character, a kid who could go either way — he could become a sociopath or a poet. (Or, one supposes, a poetic sociopath.) On the other hand, Ben is nothing but a stereotype into which no actor could breathe real life (though that doesn't stop Paul — who looks like a giant Ray Liotta — from trying).

A lot of themes, like the cross-dressing bit, are picked up and held at arm's length for a second before being put back down again, and Hall leans a little too heavily on fantasy sequences to suggest alternative paths. But in the end he delivers an intense, arresting film that doesn't always take the easiest way out. And Hall even gives a canny performance in a tiny role as a unsympathetic cab driver.

I'm inclined to give the film a break.

New this week

DELINQUENT Not rated B See full review this page. Playing: Wynsong 10

Also at area theaters

ART BORN, PG A little boring halfway through, even from a dog's perspective, but a real twist on the story of a boy and his dog. Josh

Making the grade

Rankings, capsule summaries and reviews of feature films playing in theaters in the Little Rock-North Little Rock area.

B	Excellent
B	Superior
C	Average

moments and ends up making grand gestures. Keanu Reeves plays a hot-shot young lawyer recruited to join a successful New York-based interna-

tional law firm, but once he and sexy young wife Charlize Theron hit the Big Apple, they discover that the head of the firm (Pacino as John Milton, got it?) has an ulterior motive. (144 minutes) (wire services) *THE ERIC, R* B Not a particularly

