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powers and prodigious intellects. Noah, for instance, studies spiders for his school project and discovers how to use various frequencies to get the insects to change the shape of their webs. (They build one with the shape and strength of the Golden Gate Bridge.) Emma, who sometimes loses contact with the ground as she floats along, can glimpse the future via intersecting laser beams produced via rock-like "spinners" — another gift of the black box.

Problem is, not a lot of this is connected with the main mission in the story. From the mandala-like field of flowers that opens the film to the various themes of telepathy, palm reading, levitation, crystals and time travel, Shaye offers a catalog of alternative spirituality, a few raps at the Patriot Act (after the kids cause a blackout, there's a frightening home invasion by the FBI) and the general message that the world is warming, ailing and on the way out. But there are too many distracting elements to allow a viewer total immersion in the story.

If the Wilder family is as close as we're led to believe, for instance, why don't the kids tell mom and dad (Joely Richardson, Timothy Hutton) about the black box? Because that would pretty much end the movie; keeping secrets is an essential in children's literature. "The Last Mimzy" is no different, but the children in question, while likable and sweet, are not portrayed by terribly compelling actors.

Rainn Wilson is very good as Noah's science teacher, Larry White, and Kathryn Hahn is perfect as Larry's ironic Buddhist girlfriend Naomi. Neither Hutton nor Richardson seems particularly invested in the movie, but their characters are not deeply drawn, rather serving as parental props.

Effects are understated, but convincing.

Kids will like "Mimzy" if for no other reason than it doesn't talk down to them. And it imagines they will laugh and respond to the same things as adults, something adult filmmakers often have a problem understanding.

## INTERVIEW

(U.S. — NETHERLANDS)

A Cinemavault Releasing presentation of an Ironworks Prods. and Column Pictures production. Produced by Bruce Weiss, Gijb van de Westelaken. Executive producer, Nick Stiliadis.

Directed by Steve Buscemi. Screenplay, David Schechter, Buscemi, based on the film by Theo Van Gogh and screenplay by Theodor Holman. Camera (color, Sony HD cam-to-35mm), Thomas Kist; editor, Kate Williams; music, Evan Lurie; production designer, Loren Weeks; set decorator, Christine Tonkin; costume designer, Vicki Farrell; sound editor (Dolby Digital), Mary Ellen Porto; assistant director, Nancy Herrmann; casting, Sheila Jaffe. Reviewed at Sundance Film Fest (Spectrum), Jan. 20, 2007. Running time: 84 MIN.

Katya ..... Sienna Miller  
Pierre Peders ..... Steve Buscemi

By DENNIS HARVEY

"Interview" (2003) was one of three features Dutch director Theo van Gogh hoped to remake in English when he was assassinated the next year by an Islamic extremist. His producers have gone ahead with the first of them as a tribute. Steve Buscemi's adaptation preserves the original's biting basic scenario while adding a few Americanizing tweaks to this tale of a disdainful journo's unpredictable night with the seemingly



Steve Buscemi plays a moody journo sent to write a feature story on Sienna Miller's unpredictable starlet in "Interview."

vacuous starlet he's assigned to interview. Ace perks by Sienna Miller and Buscemi himself are the main attraction in a nimble two-hander that could hazard niche theatrical but may find small screens more welcoming.

Conceived and shot in haste to showcase two actors van Gogh wanted to use together, the original "Interview" was limited to a single interior setting. Buscemi and co-scenarist David Schechter open it up a bit, particularly in the first reel. Veteran political reporter Pierre (Buscemi) is not happy to be stuck in Manhattan just as a White House scandal is breaking — and he's here because his editor (for reasons divulged only much later) has handed him just the sort of puff piece he abhors. His assignment is to profile Katya (Miller), a monomaniacal blond sexpot popular for her trashy genre movies and (amusingly excerpted) cheesy TV soap — but famous for her highly publicized love life.

Pierre's mood worsens when he's left cooling his heels for an hour in an upscale restaurant two blocks from Katya's home. She's offended by his obvious condescension, plus the fact that he seems ignorant of (and uninterested in) her life and career. Mutual accusations of unprofessionalism escalate into name-calling. Katya storms out, the "interview" over within minutes.

Outside, however, the inevitable gawking caused by her presence triggers an accident that leaves Pierre slightly injured. Katya insists on taking the dazed man to her vast loft for some cold compresses. Both chastened by the odd shift in circumstance, apologies are swapped, drinks poured and the evening begins again — its tenor shifting as often as Katya's moods, which swing freely from spoiled brat to surprising intellect to reflexive sex kitten.

Pierre isn't easily taken in. But it's the actress's prerogative to use all her guile when facing a challenge.

In the end, after much alcohol, some cocaine, a little making out and brief physical violence, these near-strangers exchange their darkest secrets. But as both acknowledge, in their world, no such exchange is ever truly equal; there are only winners and losers, and one of them is going to emerge out-manipulated.

It's doubtful whether even an out-of-control celebrity party girl would allow a reporter to get so much potential dirt on her. But the twisty nature of the clever script, performances and staging maintain an edgy, often humorous involvement that doesn't demand full suspension of disbelief.

In his fourth pic as helmer, Buscemi adopts van Gogh's favored technique of using three hand-held digital cameras for si-

multaneous coverage. Result, much aided by Kate Williams' sharp editing, is a psychological couple's dance that neatly avoids potential theatricality.

Afforded a comparatively rare chance to stretch out in a complex lead role, Buscemi is excellent, limning Pierre's career battle fatigue even as the character flickers from amusement to sympathy to contempt. Miller shows authority as Katya, who may not be a dumb blond by a long shot, but still demonstrates the self-absorption and petulance of a showbiz diva.

## PHANTOM LOVE

A KNR Prods./Menkesfilm presentation of a Kevin Ragsdale production. Produced by Ragsdale. Executive producer, Julian Goldberger. Co-producers, Nina Menkes, Ragsdale.

Directed, written, edited by Nina Menkes. Camera (B&W, 35mm-to-DV), Chris Soos; music, Rich Ragsdale; production designer, S. Logan Wince; costume designer, Erica Frank; sound, Ed White; supervising sound editors, Menkes, Joseph Tsai; sound re-recording mixer, Michael Kreple; visual effects supervisor, Tim Carras; line producers, Aditya Singh, Elyse Katz; associate producers, Lena Bubenichik, Paul Inman; assistant director, Natasha Subramaniam; casting, Bubenichik. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (New Frontiers), Jan. 19, 2007. Running time: 86 MIN.

With: Marina Shoif, Juliette Marquis, Yelena Apartseva, Bobby Naderi. (English, Russian dialogue)

By ROBERT KOEHLER

Stanley Kubrick's confident statement — "If it can be written or thought, it can be filmed" — receives stunning confirmation in Nina Menkes' "Phantom Love." While the helmer's four previous features similarly function in a state of dream logic and concern female states of being, the current pic strikingly puts a woman's subconscious thoughts and dreams onscreen in ways more radical and beautiful than in Menkes' past visually stunning semi-narrative pics. "Phantom Love" may be too rich for most U.S. distributors, but sophisticated foreign buyers and fests will lust after this piece of pure cinema.

First seen in sweaty coitus with her lover (Bobby Naderi), Lulu (Marina Shoif) appears distanced and expressionless, her face suggesting that her mind is elsewhere. "Phantom Love" is intentionally designed and structured in an open manner, welcoming the viewer to various interpretations. One of them — implied by the title — is that much of the rest of the film's images and sounds are the wandering thoughts Lulu experiences during sex.

These images are in black-and-white, and not since Bela Tarr's "Werckmeister Harmonies" has black-and-white looked so stunning and mesmerizing — thanks crucially, to cinematographer Chris Soos' masterful use of high



Nina Menkes' "Phantom Love" considers a woman's dream state.

contrasts, shadows and depth-of-field in the film's majestic interior locales. Though she has handed over lensing chores this time, Menkes functions as usual as her own camera operator, displaying again her gift for framing and nimbly following spontaneous action.

This includes several extended scenes in a Koreatown casino, where Lulu works (akin to Menkes' Vegas heroine in "Queen of Diamonds") at a roulette table. Although the scenes seem at first repetitive, they are actually staged and shot with great variety, including some amazing close-ups of the excited players' faces and hands.

As often occurs in dreams, images repeat themselves as Lulu tries to work her way through her erotically triggered troubles. One of these involves her dressed in a classic little black dress and heels, carefully walking down a long hallway around an enormous snake. Animals abound in the film, including a fantastically viewed squid in an aquarium and scenes in which Lulu's mother (Yelena Apartseva) is surrounded by bees.

Menkes is not so dreamy a scripter that she fails to link these otherwise showy and random images to Lulu's real-life problems, some of which involve struggling with her mother who's overstayed her welcome in Lulu's home, and her emotionally troubled sister Nitzan (a fine Juliette Marquis), whose momentary disappearance marks the only point in the film where a fixed psychological reality takes the place of subconscious fears and desires.

A repeated view of Lulu crossing a bridge (ravishingly filmed in Rishikesh, India) suggests a passage to another sort of life, and, in a film intently focused on material objects and bodies, the sight of Lulu being drowned in light offers a striking spiritual note.

Actors' perfs matter far less here than their place in the overall staging, but Shoif and Marquis are allowed considerable freedom to express themselves along the lines of silent cinema (the first real line of dialogue occurs well past the 30-minute mark).

Pic triggers memories of movie images from Jacques Demy's "Lola" to Jean Cocteau's "Orpheus," and an amazing shot of a sleeping woman rising off her bed sends the viewer back to the medium's earliest days. Soundtrack, mixing sound effects and Rich Ragsdale's music, creates an audio dream state of its own.

## THE SAVAGES

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day job pays the bills, but she's still trying to make it as a playwright, and her lack of success is embarrassing in that her intensely intellectual brother is a professor of theater and the author of numerous books, including one in progress on Brecht. Unmarried, she is the object of the ardent attentions of perennially horny married neighbor Larry (Peter Friedman), but the affair merely underlines her desperation.

By contrast, the disheveled Jon is well practiced at concealing his emotions, and one of the highlights of Hoffman's performance is how everything about his body language reveals Jon's desire to avoid intimacy with his sister. At first, Jon seems abrupt and too quick in how he deals with delicate matters, and he has other issues weighing heavily upon him, notably his book deadline and the imminent departure of his Polish girlfriend, whose visa is

expiring. But despite not making a show of grief or indulging Wendy's notions of how one might ideally behave, Jon without great fuss gets done what needs to be done.

That includes finding a nursing home back in Buffalo where Lenny can see out his days near the kids. Although he settles in without undue fuss, Wendy can't abide the place, and considerable humor spins off her search for a better one.

Pic's midsection possesses little forward momentum but is flecked with mixed-mood scenes that adroitly infuse the drama with the unexpected stuff life throws at people. Among them are the long-avoided conversation with Dad about what to do "when something happens," a talk with his sister Jon simply can't avoid because he's immobilized by a chin sling attached to a door, a wonderful interlude in which Lenny shows "The Jazz Singer" on movie night because it reminds him of his childhood neighborhood — but that becomes embarrassing to black viewers and white alike when Al Jolson slaps on blackface, and a couple of intimate chats Wendy has with a friendly Nigerian worker (Gbenga Akinnagbe) at the nursing home, who imparts an interesting tidbit on how staff members know who will die soon.

Perhaps best of all are the quiet, private moments, as when Wendy, lying awake at night, overhears her normally rational brother crying while on the phone to his lover, or the care with which Jon redistributes the mess in his home to accommodate Wendy when she comes to stay, in a way that suggests he really does know where everything is.

Script adroitly catches how two drama-steeped siblings might speak with one another — facing the Arizona trip, Jon reassures his sister, "We are not in a Sam Shepard play." Both actors are completely credible as the sorts of writers they are. Each perf is the flip side of the other: Hoffman's professor moves from seeming to be at the end of his rope to having more control and competence than expected, while Linney's still-aspiring writer must come to grips with her across-the-boards unrealized potential. It's a wonderful match-up of performances.

Supporting turns also provide ample pleasure, notably those of Bosco as the father and Akinnagbe as the amiable caregiver.

After the bold, parched vistas of the Arizona opening, the pic is enshrouded in a dismal Buffalo winter, which provides a measure of humor in itself. Musical choices and tech contributions are discreetly polished.

### THE SAVAGES

A Fox Searchlight release presented in association with Lone Star Film Group of a This Is That production in association with Ad Hominem Enterprises and Cooper's Town Prods. Produced by Ted Hope, Anne Carey, Erica Westheimer. Executive producers, Alexander Payne, Jim Taylor, Jim Burke, Anthony Bregman, Fred Westheimer.

Directed, written by Tamara Jenkins. Camera (Technicolor, HD), Mott Hupfel; editor, Brian A. Kates; music, Stephen Trask; production designer, Jane Ann Stewart; costume designer, David Robinson; sound (Dolby/DTS/SDDS), Matthew Price; supervising sound editor, Ben Cheah; assistant director, Chip Signore; casting, Jeanne McCarthy. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (Premieres), Jan. 19, 2007. Running time: 113 MIN.

Wendy Savage ..... Laura Linney  
Jon Savage ..... Philip Seymour Hoffman  
Lenny Savage ..... Philip Bosco  
Larry ..... Peter Friedman  
Jimmy ..... Gbenga Akinnagbe