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**True love 'Still Breathing'**

Author: *Rob Patterson*

Article Text:

These days, one may rightly wonder whether the notion of true love is on its death bed. But **"Still Breathing"** might just convince some folks that it's not yet time to pull the life-support system on romance. And this independently produced little charmer of a movie does it in a way that twists the conventions and recasts the cliches of the good old "date movie," which it's being touted as.

**"Still Breathing"** starts on somewhat shaky ground, intercutting from a bucolic San Antonio to the sometimes dangerous urban hustle and bustle of Los Angeles. Brendan **Fraser**, with long ragged hair, two-day stubble and faraway eyes, still looks like he hasn't quite brought George out of the jungle. The stunning Joanna Going has perfect leading-lady looks in her first starring role, but it's the beauty of an ice princess. It all feels so modern, so slightly Gen X, which so many movies do these days for the sake of specious youth appeal.

But then something happens as this film unfolds: It seduces you with its gentle and offbeat approach and sensibility, as a time-honored tale of love unfolds in a way that hasn't quite been told before.

**Fraser** is Fletcher, a San Antonio slacker who lives in a grand Alamo Heights house. He dances marionettes on the street in front of the Alamo. He builds cairns from rocks in his back yard. And he dreams of his true love, and tries to construct her face from pieces of photos cut from a magazine and pasted onto a giant collage on a wall of his home. In other words, he seems a bit daffy.

Going is Roz, an artist living in L.A., a thoroughly modern Millie who has forsaken her vision for cold, hard cash. In cahoots with her friend Elaine (whom Ann Magnuson portrays with delicious zeal), Roz uses her looks to con rich men out of their money for

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overpriced modern art. In short, she's a shark.

But she's the woman of Fletcher's dreams, which tell him to fly to Los Angeles to find her. When they meet, Roz thinks she's found her intended too -- her next intended mark, mistaking Fletcher for a Texas millionaire (Austin musician Junior Brown in a cameo) she wants to fleece.

With that setup, this whole affair could have been played wackily, or with high drama. But the movie's Texan director-writer James Robinson instead goes for an old-school tone as the seemingly fated mismatch unfolds. There's a touch of sweetness that balances the up-to-date flourishes, making ``**Still Breathing**'' a rather distinctive animal that is neither your current big Hollywood romance nor an indie full of hip attitude.

When the film settles into the heart of its story, it catches a dreamy mood, like the thoughts that come to mind as one settles into a spring afternoon nap. A subtlety of tone emerges, which imbues the eccentricities of Fletcher and his San Antonio crowd -- which includes Oscar winner Celeste Holm as his mother and singer Lou Rawls as a street musician -- with a winning charm.

Like the best sort of love, perhaps, ``**Still Breathing**'' is initially disconcerting, but wins you over with its steady if languid allure. In an age of disillusionment and pessimism, it's a film that still believes in the redemptive power of romance, and it just might make you believe, too.

Caption:

Brendan **Fraser** portrays a San Antonio slacker who goes to Los Angeles to find the woman of his dreams. She turns out to be a con artist played by Joanna Going.

PHOTO

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