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RAMBLING 'STILL BREATHING' STILL BEGUILING

Author: PAULA NECHAK, SPECIAL TO THE P-I

Article Text:

It's full of star-crossed meetings and has an unabashedly soft heart. It rambles on way too long to be of service to such a modest love story.

But though we've seen it all before, thousands of times, from "Ghost" to "Sleepless in Seattle," writer/director Jim Robinson injects "Still Breathing" with enough quirky charm to make it stand out from the pack.

Most of its allure comes from the casting of Brendan Fraser ("George of the Jungle") as the innocent hero, Fletcher McBracken, and less successfully, Joanna Going as cynical, melancholy Roz Willoughby.

They display enough light and dark nuance to make us believe two polar opposites could educate each other in the ways of the world and strike a fine balance in love besides.

Fraser won the best actor prize for his performance in last year's Seattle International Film Festival Golden Space Needle Awards.

His McBracken is a romantic, dreamy San Antonio street performer who comes from a long line of men who literally have visions of the woman they are destined to marry. He's haunted by dreams of a ravishing brunette and the word "Formosa," which comes to him in his sleep. Thinking Formosa stands for Taiwan, Fletcher embarks on a journey in search of his perfect mate.

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When his plane is sidetracked in Los Angeles, he winds up at the Formosa Cafe in a trendy part of town. As he heads to the bar for a soda, he meets Roz, a con artist intent upon selling expensive fine art to gullible marks. She thinks he's her Texas target. He knows she's "the one."

So how do you make a sad, wounded soul believe in love again? That's the real quest Fletcher must make in order to win Roz's love and convince her that he's not just another in a long line of fickle cads in the cold town of L.A.

"**Still Breathing**" depends upon its innocence to make it work. It juggles the smaller-town sensibility that still prevails in San Antonio against the valueless, surface glamour of L.A. : it pits the responsibility of family against the isolation of the big city, and it weighs the allure of love against the fear of commitment. In short, it's a fairy tale.

The film is helped by a terrific supporting cast. Character actors Ann

Magnuson and Toby Huss do what they can in minimal roles, as does nominee Celeste Holm.

If writer/director Robinson wasn't so obviously in love with his own material, he might have made a better, tighter film. Had he been able to cut some gratingly precious scenes and tighten the action to propel the romance along, "**Still Breathing**" would feel less indulgent and self-congratulatory. The result might have been an even bigger breath of fresh air.

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Memo:

MOVIE REVIEW: **Still Breathing**. Directed and written by James F. Robinson. Cast: Brendan **Fraser**, Joanna Going, Celeste Holm, Ann Magnuson, Toby Huss. October Films. Metro. 110 minutes. Rated PG-13 for sexual content, language.

Grade: B-

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