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**THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE**

August 26, 1998  
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**Index Terms:**  
Still Breathing (movie)  
MOVIES  
REVIEW

**Offbeat Characters Give 'Breathing' Pulse**  
Author: *Ruthe Stein, Chronicle Staff Critic*

Article Text:

RATING: (ALERT VIEWER)

**STILL BREATHING:** Romance. Starring Brendan **Fraser**, Joanna Going, Celeste Holm, Ann Magnuson and Lou Rawls. (Rated PG-13. 109 minutes. At the Roxie.)

Imagine Holly Golightly in Los Angeles instead of Manhattan. Make her as mercenary as Truman Capote's madcap creation but more cynical about men and smarter about wheedling money out of them. Now you have Roz Willoughby, the cunning temptress in **"Still Breathing."**

As Joanna Going plays her, with a touch of vulnerability under all that brittleness, Roz is one of the more intriguing female characters to come along in awhile. She seems completely immoral, going so far as pretending to have AIDS to avoid the amorous payback expected by one wealthy guy she has scammed out of a large sum of money.

**"Still Breathing"** poses the question: What happens when a tough cookie like Roz meets someone who wants to love her? This isn't presented in any ordinary boy-meets-girl kind of way. Instead, the movie strains for the magical realism of "Like Water for Chocolate."

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The magical stuff doesn't quite work. A crucial scene at the beginning, where Roz's life is saved by a mysterious dream, is meant to be captivating but comes off as merely confusing.

Still, this independent film from first-time director Jim Robinson is more original than most romances Hollywood produces. And any movie with Celeste Holm is worth seeing for that reason alone. She looks terrific and has lost none of her spark with age.

Holm plays the matriarch of a San Antonio family whose men are known for having visions of their future wives before they meet them. In this tradition, her grandson Fletcher (Brendan **Fraser**, as appealing as he was in "George of the Jungle") conjures up an image of a woman who looks remarkably like Roz.

He goes looking for her and, in updated fairy-tale fashion, finds her in a Los Angeles bar. Roz mistakes Fletcher, a street musician, for a rich Texan and tries to scam him by pretending to be a struggling artist in need of a sugar daddy to launch her career.

The movie gets into trouble when Fletcher brings Roz back to San Antonio. His down-home friends and family are just too wholesome to be believed. Like "The Horse Whisperer," "**Still Breathing**" espouses the notion that happiness can only be found in smaller towns where everyone knows everyone else -- never mind the possibility that some of these folks might be a pain in the neck if you got to know them.

The Texas scenes drag on as it slowly dawns on Roz that Fletcher doesn't have the money to keep her in the manner she's used to. The chemistry between **Fraser** and Going perks things up -- they make us care about the fate of their offbeat characters.the Roxie for salvaging it from the wasteland where movies go to die before their video reincarnation and giving it another shot on a big screen.

Caption:  
Joanna Going is the cynical young woman in "**Still Breathing**."  
PHOTO

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