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Fort Worth Star-Telegram

May 1, 1998
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Index Terms:
Movie Review

'Still Breathing' and feeling romantic
Author: *Robert Philpot; Star-Telegram Writer*

Article Text:

Still Breathing *** Director: James F. Robinson Stars: Brendan **Fraser**, Joanna Going
Length: 110 minutes Rating:PG-13

Still Breathing spends its first half-hour reinforcing a wall around the more jaded people in the audience, and then spends the rest of its running time tearing down that wall. It's a bit tricky, almost as much of a con artist as one of its leading characters.

And boy, that first half-hour is a chore, as we're treated to yet another movie with quirky characters rather than characters with quirks. It's a fine distinction, but it's the difference between a screenwriter's concoction and something that resembles real life.

But, as **Still Breathing** is fond of asking, what do movies have to do with real life?

Not much, in the case of Fletcher (Brendan **Fraser**), a San Antonio street musician and puppeteer who makes monuments out of piled-up stones, plays the cornet in duets with his tuba-playing grandmother, sleeps on the piano and makes collages out of magazine photos in search of his dream girl. **Fraser's** puppy-dog eyes, crooked, thick-lipped grin, unkempt mane of hair and perpetual three-day beard practically stamp "romantic dreamer" on Fletcher's forehead. He's so charmingly eccentric, you almost

Fletcher's LA counterpart is Roz (Joanna Going), a cynical con artist - and what is a cynic, after all, but a wounded romantic? Roz is a kind of love agnostic - she'll believe in it when she sees it, but even then she'll take a lot of convincing. For now, she uses her wide eyes, breathy voice and always slightly parted lips to dupe wealthy would-be lotharios out of

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The movie spends some time going back and forth between San Antonio and LA, trying our patience with Fletcher's quiriness and artsy black-and-white dream sequences. But when Fletcher's pursuit of his fantasy woman leads him to LA, he and Roz meet, and the movie settles down a bit and starts relying on its own charms rather than the oddities of its characters.

Like Fletcher, writer-director James F. Robinson is from San Antonio, and he works out a lot of his California vs. Texas issues in the script, from the way Fletcher dresses down a smug Los Angeleno after an anti-Texas remark to Fletcher's reverie about why a window-unit air conditioner is so comforting. Robinson's writing style is sort of reminiscent of Ben Affleck and Matt Damon's in *Good Will Hunting*: At times, he's so show-offy that you can virtually see the letters appearing on his word-processor screen, but the words resonate so well that you either forgive him or just don't care.

He gets a lot of help from **Fraser** and **Going**. **Fraser** knows how to use his unconventional handsomeness; he spends a lot of time looking like a big kid, and he makes you believe Fletcher's ingenuous world view. **Going's** performance is more subtle: she does a lot of acting with those wide eyes, and never seems to lose the mistrust and fear in them, even as she's flirting aggressively. She uses her voice, too, to convey Roz's uncertainty and growing vulnerability. Maybe all she's doing is seducing the guys in the audience, but it's effective.

October Films is pushing **Still Breathing** as a romantic comedy, but it's more accurate to just call it a romance - and a pretty unabashed romance at that, right down to Robinson's impressionistic closing shots. It's as much about fate as the concurrently running *Sliding Doors*, which feels like a companion piece, and almost as much about Texas as the wonderful *Dancer, Texas Pop. 81*, which also opens this weekend. More than anything, though, it's about the theory that there's someone out there for everyone - and that you may have to go to a whole 'nother city to find the person for you.

Still Breathing is rated PG-13 for sexual situations and adult subject matter.

Caption:
PHOTO(S): October Films

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