

Film plays games with gender, time, reality

Mary Riepma Ross
Film Theater

"Orlando"

They don't make movies like this anymore.

In fact, they never made movies like this.

The closest thing to "Orlando" (beginning Thursday at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater) would be one of those hip quasi-experimental films from the early 1970s that fill up the afternoon matinees on TV.

Only this film is prettier, wittier and better made than any of them.

Based on the novel by Virginia Woolf, "Orlando" is a story of gender, youth and age, sex and the burden of the past.

It follows the life of Orlando, a young man in 1600, who receives a peamage from Queen Elizabeth on the condition that he never grow old.

By now everyone knows what happens next: Orlando is transformed into a woman.

An accident of timing is the largest similarity between this and the acclaimed "The Crying Game." Genders aren't so much bent here

as clarified. Orlando feels the same about herself/himself whether female or male.

There's at least one other cross-gender role: Quintin Crisp is the ultimate in decayed age as the "virgin queen" Elizabeth.

The film has come under a good deal of scrutiny for the gender crossing it does, though one wonders why.

This kind of thing has been popular for decades in the theater. It's called non-traditional casting and is a great tool of liberation.

Theater audiences have grown used to productions in which a black man may play the father of a Chinese boy, in turn played by a grown woman.

And if Orlando is the youth who never grew up, then — like Mary Martin of "Peter Pan" — Tilda Swinton of "Orlando" is a fresh and appropriate choice.

What's more remarkable about the film is its playfulness with time and reality.

Decades pass in seconds; things take a long time to come to fruition.

Orlando staggers through a World War I battlefield painfully

pregnant. In the 1990s her daughter is only a small child.

This is a film that wants to push the boundaries of our sensibilities about time — in order to finally break free of the constraint and weight of the past.



Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

Orlando, left, (played by Tilda Swinton) and Shelmerdine (Billy Zane) appear in Orlando, a film by Sally Potter. The film will begin its run Thursday at Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater.

This is a brilliant and fun film, appropriate for all ages and entirely delightful.

Writer/director Sally Potter's grand "Orlando" is a magic world one will want to visit again, and soon.

— Mark Baldrige

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Garver

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years ago and some of the old clientele who used to follow us from Boogie Grass happened to be at the show. It

was kind of cool seeing them again."

No doubt ex-Boogie Grass Fever fans will think it's cool to catch McClure and Garver on-stage tonight, playing with Brooks.

"I didn't think it'd go as far it has, but it has — with a lot of luck, a lot of hope and a lot of hard work," he said.

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