

Film shows love

By JEFF RANDALL
Film Critic

As a filmmaker in the 1970s, John Cassavetes churned out a catalog of highly personal, character-driven films. But as "She's So Lovely" demonstrates, he left behind some unmade films with just as much of an emotional wallop.

The script for this film was written by Cassavetes more than a decade ago. When he died, it appeared that the film might never be made. But Sean Penn, an heir apparent to Cassavetes' crown, and Nick Cassavetes, the renegade director's son, wouldn't let that happen.

It's a good thing they didn't. "She's So Lovely" is — at its simplest — an on-screen romance that rolls with the best of 'em. But this film twists the love story typical of Hollywood cinema and turns it into an examination of devotion, dependency and insanity — in other words, all the elements of love that make it such a rare and occasionally troubling occurrence.

Penn and his real-life wife, Robin Wright Penn, co-star as Eddie and Maureen, a married couple with an unusual marital setup. It seems that Eddie often wanders off for days, leaving his pregnant wife behind and wondering where he is.

The film opens with Maureen on another search for Eddie. While waiting for him to return, she is assaulted by a surly neighbor (James Gandolfini). And by the time she finds Eddie, she has pretty much put the incident behind her.

But Eddie refuses to believe Maureen's excuses for her bruises and demands to know who beat her up. As a result, he goes on a boisterous rampage that culminates in him shooting a mental health worker and waving a gun in front of a crowd of police officers.

Eddie is institutionalized and, despite his obviously unstable condition, Maureen promises him that he'll be out in three months.

Ten years later, Eddie is finally released from the institution. By now, Maureen has married Joey (John Travolta) and had three children (the first being her and Eddie's). Convinced that Maureen still wants him back, Eddie plans to rescue her from Joey and go back to their old life. Joey, as would be expected, is not pleased with the situation; and Maureen is confused.

This is a love story, Cassavetes-style. It works not only because of the excellent screen-writing, but also

The Facts

Title: "She's So Lovely"
Stars: Sean Penn, Robin Wright Penn, John Travolta
Director: Nick Cassavetes
Rating: R (language, violence)
Grade: A
Five Words: Love story gone fantastically wrong

because the cast that was selected to bring those words to life seems to have much more than a financial attachment to the film. This film is a labor of love, and it shows.

Penn, who made his pseudo-retirement from acting a few years back, in all likelihood will garner another Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of Eddie, the gun-waving, fanatical romantic. The character's jumps from lovelorn innocent to wild-eyed mental patient are as seamless as could be expected, and Penn's charm radiates through even in scenes where his actions are almost despicable.

Robin Wright Penn may be another Oscar contender. Even though Eddie is the one institutionalized, Maureen is the truly crazy figure in this story, and Wright Penn pushes this aspect of her character through with a subtlety that shows her own charm and radiance.

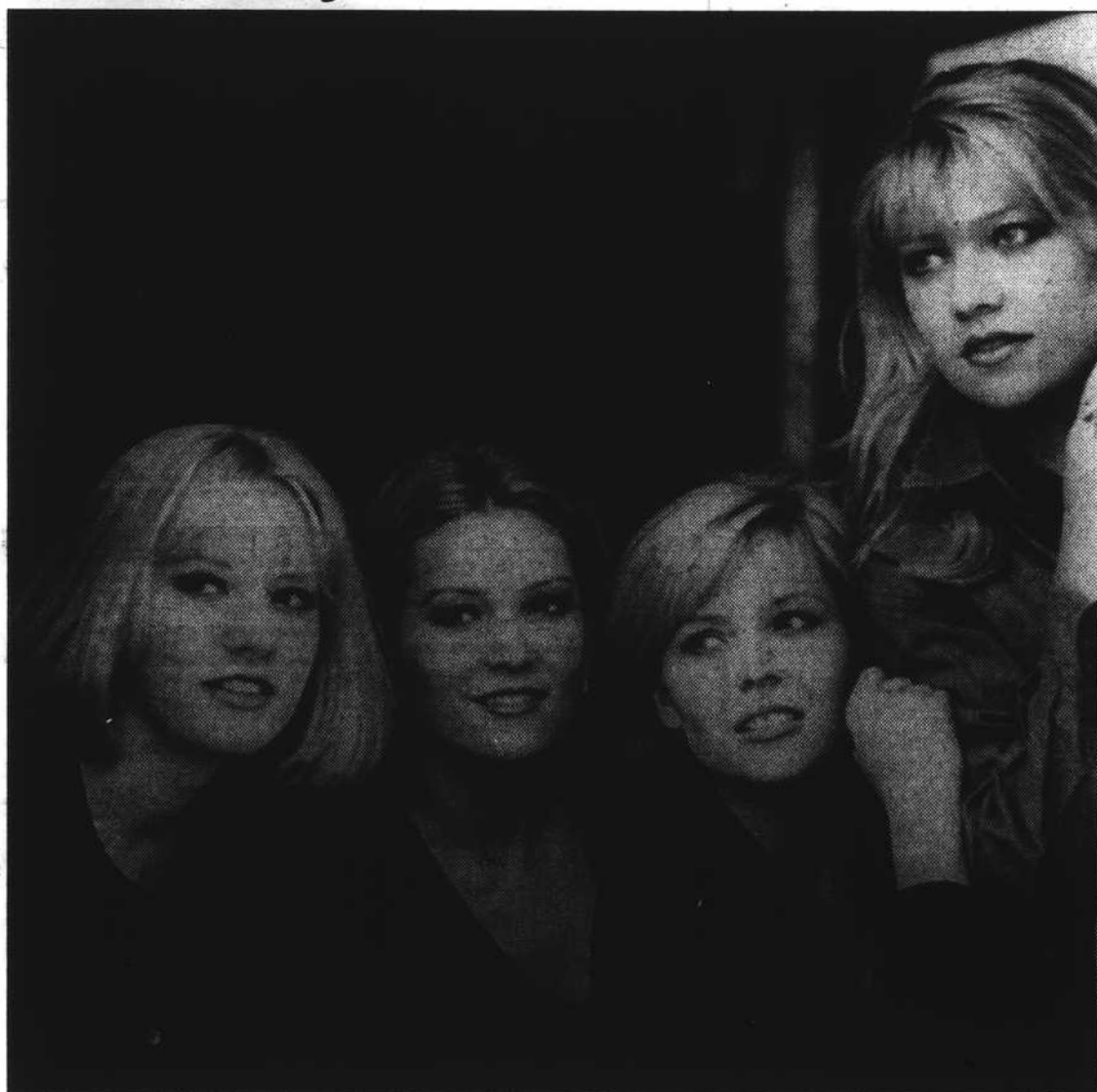
Travolta, as usual, brings his own traits to the character of Joey, the "other man" who — depending on your point of view — is truly the wronged man in this story. His flamboyance and strength balance Penn's quiet confidence almost perfectly.

Harry Dean Stanton and Debi Mazar are equally solid as the bickering couple that keep Eddie and Maureen in check.

Nick Cassavetes does his father's script justice here, too. He keeps the story well-paced and holds back in situations where other directors might feel compelled to become heavy-handed. His touch is restrained enough to allow his actors to shine on their own; and with a cast like this, that's a good thing.

"She's So Lovely" is by no means typical Hollywood fare. The characters are not all likable, even when they try to do the right thing, and the ending is — by the usual standards — unexpected. But after a summer filled with worse-than-expected flops and cutout characterizations, "She's So Lovely" is a long-awaited change of pace; and it's definitely one for the better.

We are family



MULBERRY LANE, a quartet of sisters from Omaha, will perform its critically-acclaimed original music Saturday at the Mill, 800 P St. The group, from left to right, includes Allie, Jaymie, Rachel and Heather Rizzuto. The two-hour set will begin at 9 p.m.

Bar gets touch of theater from students

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior Reporter

When most people think of a trip to the theater, they picture lobbies with chandeliers, stairways with deep red carpet and actors performing under the lights on a proscenium stage.

Two University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater students — Adam DeMars and Bradley Mausbach — are challenging this notion. The two are taking theater into the bar.

DeMars and Mausbach, who have worked at the Brass Rail, 1416 O St., for almost four years, produced James McClure's "Lone Star" at the bar last April.

"I think as a theater student it's a

great experience to do theater outside of the university because you learn how to market yourself and make some money while doing it," Mausbach said. "I learned as the production of 'Lone Star' went on about the complexities of a production budget. That weird thing we call money can change a lot of things."

Bolstered by positive feedback after their endeavors, Mausbach and DeMars decided to continue bringing theater into the Brass Rail.

"We had a lot of good feedback on the script fitting the atmosphere of the place and identifying with the audience," Mausbach said. "A lot of people who don't know much about theater came to our shows. Our most crowded night was 80 people, and our

least crowded night was about 45."

Future plans for Brass Rail productions include an open-microphone day on Wednesdays, the conversion of a screenplay for the stage and the production of a Sam Sheperd script.

"We want to appeal to the non-theater-going crowd as well as the theater lovers," DeMars explained. "Theater is for everybody, and we hope the Brass Rail can increase people's exposure."

To do so, DeMars and Mausbach would like to involve others in their productions.

"I would like to involve not just theater students, but students at large," DeMars said. "It's a lot of work, but it gives you a sense of pride to do it on your own."

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