

'Soldier's Daughter' looks at family life

BY DIANE BRODERICK
Staff writer

The title "A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries" perfectly conveys the film's dramatic core.

It is a highly emotional family drama that manages to sidestep overly tragic scenes.

Currently showing at the Mary Riepma Ross Theater, the film focuses

on an American family living in Paris in the '60s. Kris Kristofferson ("Convoy," "Blade") plays Bill Willis, a soldier-turned-writer who is constantly working on this and that, but seemingly never a big project.

His daughter Channe (Leelee Sobieski, a ringer for a young Helen Hunt), and adopted son Billy (Jesse Bradford) reap the benefits of having an understanding father. He always has the right thing to say and is always around, working in his den.

This seemingly constant presence is akin to Mike Brady's on "The Brady Bunch," but the same can't be said for Bill's wife.

Barbara Hershey ("Portrait of a Lady"), who sports disturbingly short bangs coupled with various hair lengths, plays Channe's and Billy's mother, Marcella.

Though she commits no serious wrongdoings to her children, aside from having a constant drink in her hand, it's clear that Bill is the more fostering parent.

Directed by James Ivory and produced by Ishmail Merchant, known for "Howard's End" and "Remains of the Day," "Soldier's Daughter" is easier to relate to and more contemporary than their previous works.

The story centers on Channe and the men in her life. As she grows from a young girl in Paris to a teen whose family has moved back to the United States, the film is divided into three chapters, titled for her brother, her father and her friend Francis (Anthony Roth Costanzo).

These divisions highlight the highly episodic story line. More than a concrete plot, it has the feel of simply being about a family.

Small touches make things in the movie feel like real family memories: In one scene Bill watches a John Wayne movie on television dubbed in French. He makes fun of the dubbing while his

son laughs in the background.

Other television shots nod to something a lot of other movies skim over: the ubiquitous presence of the running television in most households.

More dramatic scenes are undercut with comic touches that make the movie true-to-life.

While Channe has her period during class, it just happens to be during a sing-a-long to a very bouncy version of the Beatles' "Let it Be." A goofy teacher watches Channe excuse herself to leave, then picks up with another verse.

Even tense hospital scenes leave a comic rather than depressing aftertaste.

But perhaps the most lasting impression the film gives is its portrayal of Paris in the '60s.

Children sit at a kitchen table and smoke cigarettes. An opera Channe attends with her entertaining though unusual friend Francis features drug use, masturbation and homicide.

When Bill's health begins to fade, the family moves to the United States, the unorthodox upbringing the children had in France really comes through.

After growing up in a highly sexualized culture, Channe finds reactions to her casual attitude toward sex startling, and Billy is shunned by classmates.

The only real drawbacks of the story are the sporadic subtitled and the somewhat slow-moving plot line.

At the start of the film, it settles into subtitles, but then jumps to English and then continually and abruptly goes back and forth.

This makes watching the film slightly trying, and only adds to how long it feels. The rather jumbled organization of the movie also makes it seem drawn out.

But the end results are simply realism and authenticity, because feeling a bit trapped or

confused is all part of being in a family.

The Facts

Title: "A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries"
Stars: Kris Kristofferson, Barbara Hershey, Leelee Sobieski, Jesse Bradford
Director: James Ivory
Rating: R
Grade: B
Five Words: "Soldier's Daughter" an honest portrait



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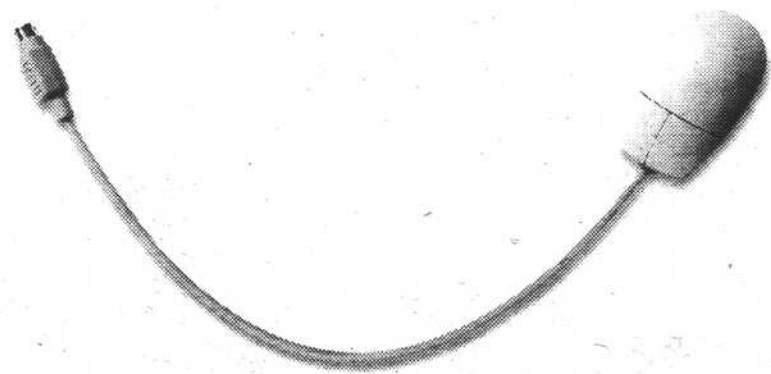
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