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'Mother' serious, yet comical film

By Josh Nichols
 Staff writer

Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar has been making movies about the extreme lifestyles including drug addicts and drag queens since the 1980s.

His reputation for producing wild, off-the-wall screenplays is upheld in his latest serious yet comical film, "All About My Mother."

The initial setting of this film is in Madrid, Spain, and the story centers on single mother Manuela, played by Cecilia Roth, and her insightful, creative teenage son, Esteban, played by Eloy Azorín.

Almodóvar is able to bring out an unusually tight bond between mother and child in the film's first 10 minutes.

This is all the time allowed to get to know Esteban before he is struck and killed by a car shortly after the film begins.

This dark, rainy scene, in which

Manuela runs to her son's side after he has been hit, is seen through the eyes of Esteban as he lies on the ground dying.

Esteban's sideways view of his mother kneeling next to him ends when he closes his eyes to die.

At least, he kind of dies. His brain dies, but his heart continues to beat, which brings about the first of the film's many coincidences.

Manuela, who works as a nurse in an organ transplant hospital, must sign the forms agreeing to have her son's heart transferred to a person in need.

She is usually the person consoling and convincing the family member of the deceased he or she is making the right choice, but now the roles are reversed.

Pretty ironic.

During her time in the hospital, Manuela reads the last entry in her son's journal, which the aspiring writer carried with him at all times.

It refers to a conversation she and Esteban had the previous evening about

the father he did not know.

It read, "I want to meet him, I don't care who he is, or how he behaved with my mother. No one can take that right away from me."

This note sends Manuela on a journey because she feels obligated to find the father and inform him of his son's death.

This journey leads her to Barcelona, where she encounters her old life as a young actress — a life she ran from 17 years ago.

It is at this point in the movie when you know you're at an Almodóvar film.

The characters in the rest of the movie include a transsexual prostitute, a pregnant nun dying of AIDS and a lesbian actress addicted to heroin.

The role that draws one in more than any other is that of the transsexual prostitute, Agrado, played by Antonia San Juan.

Agrado is an old friend of Esteban's father and of Manuela.

Agrado repeatedly says that she's

REVIEW ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

DIRECTOR:
 Pedro Almodovar

STARRING:
 Cecilia Roth,
 Marisa Paredes,
 Penelope Cruz

RATED:
 R (language, brief nudity)

GRADE: B+

FIVE WORDS:
 Tragic plot provides funny moments

been named Agrado because "she's always tried to make life agreeable for others."

It's hard not to love Agrado and her off-the-wall, foul-mouthed remarks.

In one scene, after having quit prostitution because of Manuela's influ-

Please see MOTHER on 11

True story of 'Hurricane' lost in Hollywood glitz

By Shelley Mika
 Staff writer

In 1976, Bob Dylan wrote the epic song "Hurricane" about framed boxer Rubin Carter with a swift story line and

original lyrics.

Had the movie done the same, it would have been a success.

The story is a good one, not only in its plot twists, but also in its inherent exposure of a racist atrocity.

The gist is this: Rubin Carter (Denzel Washington) is a boxer who has been framed for the murders of three white bar patrons. Although several people have vouched that Carter and his friend John Artis (Garland Whit) were not the suspects, a detective with a racially motivated grudge against Carter implicates him in the murders.

After two all-white jury trials, Carter's guilt is assumed by the public. Despite the help of famous personalities like Dylan and Muhammad Ali, the

innocent Carter faces the reality of life imprisonment.

The basic story line suggests a soul-searching biography with political roots. By nature, the film can't avoid this. However, it doesn't exactly come off as strictly a biography.

Instead the film begins in a "cops and robbers" fashion. This is Hollywood, remember? A scene can't go by without bits of overly dramatic dialogue and intense stare downs.

For example, Carter has just discovered that he's been set up. While the average citizen would be sweating bullets, Carter shoots a round of way-too-catchy expletives at the detective's face. The dialogue just doesn't ring true.

The film is full of these sensational dramatic moments, and the translation from real life to Hollywood gets lost. Some dialogue is realistic, but it's either narrated directly from Carter's book or is stolen from Dylan's song: actual lines are played off as exchanges between characters.

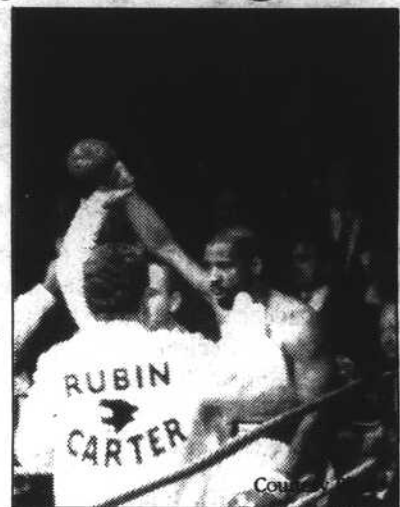
First and foremost, the film is supposed to be a biography, not an action flick. Unfortunately, these objectives are reversed, and the viewer is distanced from the main character.

Because the emotional scenes are more frequent, the true goal of the film comes back into play. Performances by Washington, as well as the supporting cast, lend to the shift in mood.

But the strong cast isn't enough to sit through this movie for more than two hours. With the emphasis on drama and action one might think the film moves along quickly — but not quite. An imbalance of important and unimportant material from beginning to end burdens the beginning and sells the end short.

The entire plot is more or less given in the first third of the movie. Thereafter, the audience is retold the same story with more detail. Though details are important in a story such as this, does the audience really have to be fed the plot twice?

The repetition would have been tol-



REVIEW THE HURRICANE

DIRECTOR:
 Norman Jewison

STARRING:
 Denzel Washington,
 Vicellous Reon Shannon

RATED:
 R (language and some violence if boxing is considered violent)

GRADE: C+

FIVE WORDS:
 Important biography distorted by Hollywood

erable if pivotal victories hadn't been overlooked in the end. By this time, it feels as if the director starts to cut corners. After so much background detail, it seems a travesty to skip over emotional triumphs.

Despite these skipped moments, the end is rife with cheers for the contender Carter as the final third of the movie provides enough sentiment for the audience to empathize.

"The Hurricane" is a feel-good film for movie-goers with patience. For those who lack that virtue, check out Dylan's song: it tells the story shorter...and sweeter.

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