



Jessica Lange stars as country/western singer Patsy Cline in "Sweet Dreams," a maudlin biography of the Grand Ole Opry star who died in a plane crash 22 years ago.

the movies

Dan Greenberg

Patsy Cline's life comes to screen as soapish drama

"Sweet Dreams" is OK but not much more. The whole enterprise is rather boring, in spite of some pretty good performances, notably Jessica Lange as country/western singer Patsy Cline, Ann Wedgeworth as her mother Hilda Hensley, and Ed Harris as Patsy's second husband, Charlie Dick.

Producer Bernard Schwartz ("Coal Miner's Daughter") and director Karol Reisz ("Night Must Fall") seem intent on avoiding the clichéd Hollywood struggle to show-biz success. Instead they present a maudlin domestic tragedy that overwhelms the music as the characters put their worst foot forward.

Patsy Cline was a talented Virginia girl whose singing career was characterized by a somewhat unusual popular appeal for a country/western star. Her career was cut short by a tragic 1963 plane crash when she was 30 years old.

Patsy sang at the Grand Ole Opry, the Hollywood Bowl, Carnegie Hall and on the "Arthur Godfrey Show" — only the first and last are seen in the film — as well as in a lot of bars and roadhouse joints, in real life and in the film.

HER DOMESTIC life was not as successful. Since her first husband, Gerald Cline (James Staley), was a boring old stick-in-the-mud, she divorced him in favor of Charlie Dick, a hard-drinking, lovable but sometimes brutish boor.

Their lives, which fill most of "Sweet Dreams," had ups and downs, mostly the latter if the film is to be believed. Typical of the downs was her disfigurement in an auto accident while going to get more beer for her sister's graduation party. After much rehabilitative therapy, the ugly purple scars disappear.

Charlie's beatings didn't leave visible scars. Patsy's particular theory and sentimental style, a blend of romantic ballads and country/western, is pleasant to listen to. The "Sweet Dreams" soundtrack contains many of Patsy's recordings made between 1960 and 1963. Lange's contribution to this film includes excellent lip synch with those recordings, with only one slight mix — a considerable effort considering the large number of musical numbers.

But the continual alteration of domestic conflict (occasionally a little love) with Patsy's solos is not the stuff of which great films are made, or even particularly entertaining ones. It seems that producer Schwartz, director Reisz and screenwriter Robert Getchell ("Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore") never decided clearly what kind of movie they wanted to make.

If this were to be a show-biz spectacular, then the film needs more than Lange's solo performances as Patsy, no matter how well done those sequences may be. The Hollywood Bowl, Carnegie Hall and the Grand Ole Opry have a lot more show-biz excitement than "Sweet Dreams" does.

THE ARTHUR Godfrey interlude is almost embarrassing, as Bruce Kirby mugs his way through playing it like the last-place contestant in an Arthur Godfrey-Look-Alike Contest.

By-and-large, Patsy ambles on through, however slowly, to a successful singing career with no real struggle, except with her husband Charlie who beats her quite regularly. Their struggle is also apparent on the psychological level.

The Patsy Cline Story," as told in "Sweet Dreams," never rises above its materials, no matter how hard and how well Lange and Harris try.

Country-western fans will enjoy this rendition but I got tears in my ears from lying on my back and crying over big-budget films that waste a lot of talent on a weak story.

On radio

Mike Whart, a Birmingham resident for more than 18 years, is again heard on his award-winning show "Kaleidoscope," which returned to the air after a two-year absence. The program is presented from 6 to 7 p.m. Mondays-Fridays on WQRS (105-FM). "Kaleidoscope" focuses on music but also explores the worlds of history, science, theology, humor, politics, arts, music and letters.



Show begins 4th TV season

The reinstated "World Adventure Series" TV show has been renewed and will begin its fourth year Saturday, on WTVS, Channel 56.

Kenard Lawrence is host of the TV show and also hosts "Travel Talk," a telephone call-in show on radio station WXYT. Lawrence is coordinator of the World Adventure Series, perennial travel/adventure film lecture series at

the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The one-hour TV program is an outgrowth of the "George Pierrot Show," which was telecast every night of the week for 25 years before being taken off the air seven years ago.

The new show is of the same format, but without commercials, as veteran world-traveler cinematographers present their filmed adventures with live narration.



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Ed Harris plays Patsy Cline's second husband, Charlie Dick, in "Sweet Dreams," co-starring Ann Wedgeworth and directed by Karol Reisz.