

MOVIES

Friends are forever in 'Waiting to Exhale'

By PATRICIA BIRBY
AP NEWSWIRE

In "Waiting to Exhale," now playing at metro Detroit movie theaters, we are served up the lives of four incredibly attractive and vicious women as they stumble through a legion of love affairs, most of which end in heartbreak and disappointment. This women's film — it's a virtual ode to estrogen that drives home a time-honored truth in the nightclub: Men come and go but female friends are forever.

Actor Forest Whitaker ("The Crying Game") directs the adaptation of Terry McMillan's bestselling novel and he paints the sexes in stark terms: Men, by and large, are rats and scoundrels and women are their long-suffering superior.

Whitaker keeps the story briskly paced and it flutters lightly along, even when he's getting laughs at terribly bitter moments. But for all this deft surface sentiment, there's something hollow at the core. Perhaps that's the price of trying to piece together the crowded lives of the film's four heroines; we are so busy taking in the twists and turns of their hearts that it is allowed to resonate from within.

Still, there's lots to love here — a clear-eyed celebration of strength and feminine solidarity, along with a gutsy declaration of sexual independence. But, just like the plight of the women on screen, you'll ache for more.

The Twentieth Century Fox film opens on New Year's Eve as Savannah Jackson (Whitney Houston) pulls into Phoenix, looking for a good man and success as a television producer — even if it's hard to say in what order. She's drawn there by her best friend, Bernadine Harris (Angela Bassett), who is facing her own upheaval. Bernie's husband rudely decides to leave her that night for his white housekeeper.

Then there's Robin Stokes (Lela Rochon), a girl on the prowl

REVIEW

For romance. She's so starved for a decent relationship that she can't see the man she's with is a drug dealer. "Maybe I might be a good influence on him," she says hopelessly, and of course, naively. Finally, there's Gloria Johnson (Loretta Devine), a bubbly, giggling gem who almost steals the film. She's a single mother who is trying to raise a teen-age son, Tariq (Donald Adesun Faloni), while tending to her hair salon. She may be overweight but she's still brimming with sensuality. That plus her innate sweetness

and vulnerability make her irresistible.

The foursome become involved with a seemingly endless string of louts: married men who cheat, single men who cheat, criminals who cheat and steal and office cads who publicly humiliate. Only two men seem to have any scruples and coincidentally both are men whose wives are dead or dying: Marvin (Gregory Hines), Gloria's next-door neighbor who's a widower, and James (Wesley Snipes in an uncredited role), a mysterious stranger whose wife is dying when he meets Bernie at a bar.

3 GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINATIONS

BEST PICTURE (MUSICAL OR COMEDY)
BEST ACTOR — HARRISON FORD (MUSICAL OR COMEDY)
BEST ORIGINAL SONG — "MOONLIGHT"



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