



## High Infidelity

### By Todd Anthony

The twelfth annual Miami Film Festival opens this Friday with local resident David Frankel's sleek and smart **Miami Rhapsody**. Second-guessing the festival's opening and closing selections has become an annual rite. I already have heard grumbling that a "deeper" film should have kicked off the schedule, something less facile and less Hollywood than Frankel's motion picture debut.

I disagree. While *Rhapsody* is no *Belle époque* (last year's opener), it is a fine film in its own right, with an abundance of South Florida tie-ins that begin with homeboy Frankel. This *Rhapsody* is anything but blue; it percolates with wit, radiates charm, and features a deft multiethnic ensemble cast. The lovingly photographed South Florida settings that compose the film's backdrop are a tourism-conscious civic booster's wet dream. And the steady stream of caustic one-liners that flows from the commitment-wary protagonist's mouth is bound to evoke comparison to the work of another American filmmaker: Woody Allen.

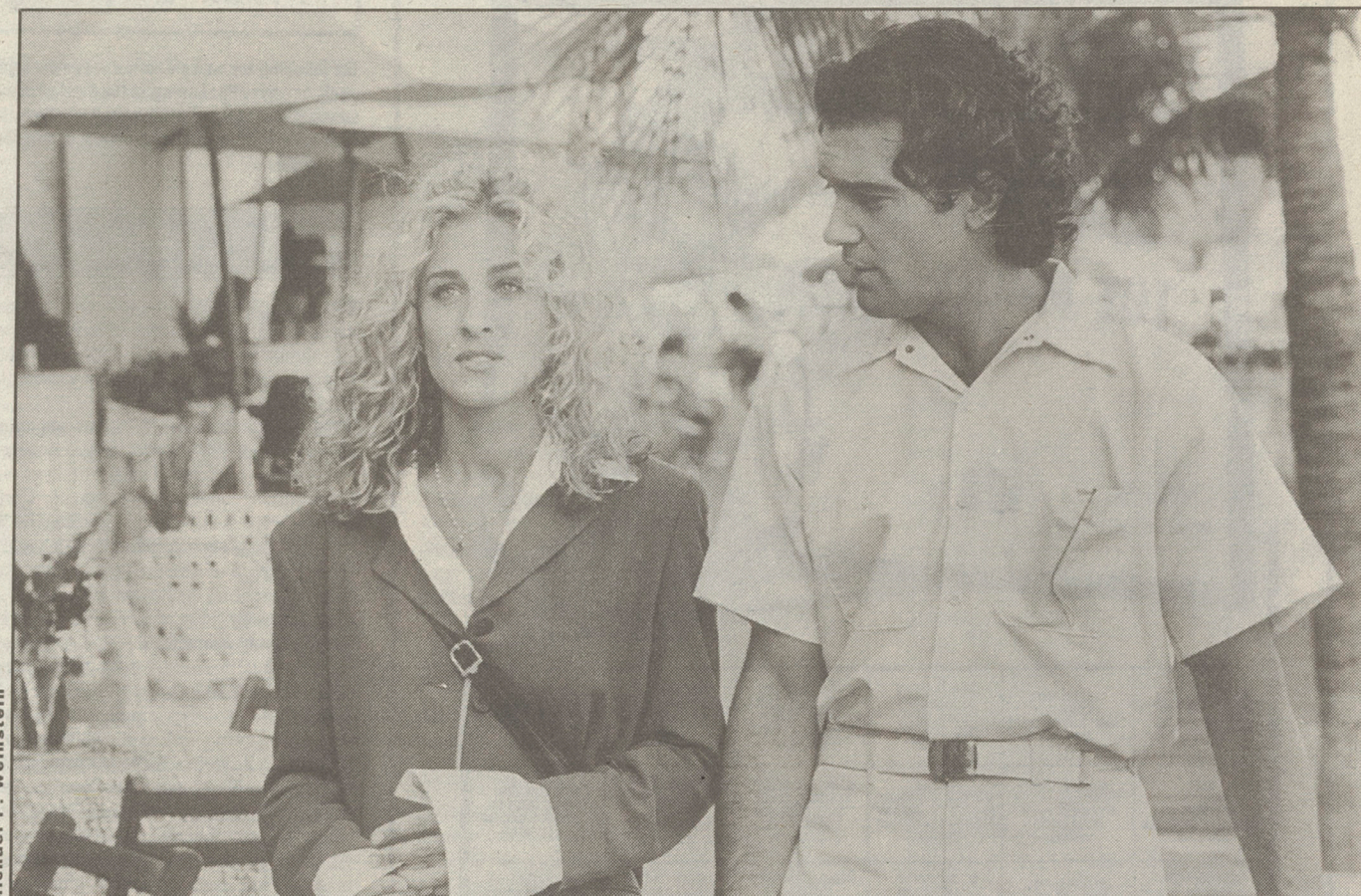
But don't sell Frankel short as a poor man's Woody. *Miami Rhapsody* resembles Paul Mazursky's (*Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*; *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*) early comedies as much as it does Allen's. (Mazursky, ironically enough, flexes some acting muscle in *Rhapsody*.) But Frankel has no one to blame for the Allen parallels but himself. With its irreverent humor, urbane chatter, and neurotic, self-absorbed, relationship-obsessed protagonist, *Miami Rhapsody* seems to beg for the comparison. And as if those traits weren't enough Woody kindling to ignite the faux-Allen fire, there's the presence of long-time Allen leading lady Mia Farrow in a key supporting role.

Frankel goes so far as to open his film with an actor directly addressing the audience à la Allen's Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall*. "I was a middle child," she confides. "I always feel like the really good moments are happening to someone else." It's a sentiment that would not have sounded out of place springing from Alvy's lips.

The actors who populate *Miami Rhapsody* don't look much like Allen alumni, though. Frankel's film is as glossy as an issue of *Ocean Drive*, while Allen's work is less flashy and more substantive, along the lines of, say, *The New Yorker* (pre-Tina Brown, naturally). Try to imagine *Hannah and Her Sisters* crossed with *Baywatch*. Suave, smoldering Antonio Banderas plays a male nurse in an old-folks home. Supermodel Naomi Campbell portrays a supermodel (quite a stretch!). Former Houston Oiler Bo Eason appears as a pro football player (ditto!). But scratch the surface and there's a heart of sulfur beating beneath *Rhapsody*'s evenly tanned epidermis.

Sarah Jessica Parker is Gwyn Marcus, a young advertising copywriter who reluctantly accepts the marriage proposal of her doting zoologist boyfriend (Gil Bellows), then almost immediately begins second-guessing her decision. Fueling Gwyn's doubt is the fact that every member of her family is married and having an affair. Her mother (Mia Farrow) is stepping out with Banderas; her father (Mazursky) is racking up frequent-flyer miles with his travel agent; her older brother (Kevin Pollak) is leaving his pregnant wife to shack up with his business partner's spouse (Campbell); and her freshly married younger sister is using Gwyn's apartment to cheat on her penny-pinching ballplayer hubby (Eason).

"I just can't imagine Mom having sex with



another man," Gwyn tells her father when he informs her that he suspects his wife of infidelity. "I still shudder when I think of her having sex with you."

Gwyn has mastered the art of cracking wise as a defense mechanism. The sharp-tongued adwoman has rejoinders for every occasion. When her mother unexpectedly confirms her father's suspicions and adds insult to injury by divulging *his* affair, Gwyn reflexively sputters, "It's a little unnerving to find out both your parents are committing adultery. It's not the norm. We're not from L.A."

Nor from *Manhattan*. Frankel's characters are distinctively South Floridian: Gwyn's fiancé works at Metrozoo, Antonio lives in Little Havana, her parents shop at Bal Harbour, and her brother is strictly South Beach. Gwyn Marcus is exactly the kind of shallow, self-absorbed character the Woodman

occasions. Of course, Rohmer is French, his movies take themselves very seriously, and he has friends at that prestigious arbiter of cinematic taste, *Cahiers du cinema*. Frankel is American; he wants you to enjoy his movie first and think about it second, and he has friends at a TV network. He cannot possibly be in Rohmer's league, despite *Miami*'s rhapsodizing about the frailty of love and the obsolescence of marriage, as well as about that inexplicable human willingness — *compulsion*, even — to defy the odds and shoot for happily-ever-after.

The film's biggest weakness is also its greatest strength — character development is subordinated to snappy dialogue. The constant quipping makes us laugh but prevents us from getting too close to any of Frankel's characters. Sexy Sarah Jessica Parker's spitfire Gwyn is Exhibit A. Parker is a first-rate comedian. But her character's anxiety is less than convincing because Parker, despite her game attempts to conceal the fact for most of this film, is a fetching sight: blue eyes to rival Newman's own, dazzling gilded locks, treacherous curves. It's like watching Naomi Campbell freak out over a blemish. Most of us would love to have such problems. You pull for the losers Woody Allen plays at least partly because he's such a homely guy. With a face like that he *better* make people laugh. (Before all you model apologists start firing off angry letters, let me assure you that this is not to suggest that beautiful people can't obsess over their love lives just like the rest of us — merely that it's harder to sympathize with them when they do. Especially in movies.)

Parker's acting ability goes a long way toward negating her attractiveness, just as Banderas is skilled enough to pull off the role of nursing-home mambo king. When Gwyn's fiancé stresses the need to compromise and makes the fatal mistake of asking "Who doesn't?" Parker retorts, "Arabs and Republicans." Her voice is cocky enough to give the line bite, but also vulnerable enough to betray the fear she is attempting to mask. It's a balancing act she sustains throughout the film, being hip and quick and funny enough to make us overlook her obvious physical charms. How audiences react to her performance will be the biggest single factor in determining whether *Miami Rhapsody* soars or is forgotten quicker than last year's tourism slogan. I say see it like a native, and let the festival begin. **NT**

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**▲ Goldilocks and the Mambo King: Parker and Banderas do their best to downplay the curse of their looks**

**Miami Rhapsody. Written and directed by David Frankel; with Sarah Jessica Parker, Mia Farrow, Antonio Banderas, Gil Bellows, Paul Mazursky, and Kevin Pollak. For more information about this year's Miami Film Festival, see "Calendar Listings."**