

Film review

'Sons'

By DUANE BYRGE

"Sons" is a love story involving four males — all in the same family. Unlike other current art house offerings, it's not kinky, anti-establishment or bedeviled by ratings controversy. It's the jaunty story of three sons who take their elderly father back to Normandy, attempting to reunite him for one last moment with the "love of his life."

It's sweet, funny and sensitive, with legendary director Sam Fuller in the role as the old man. With good word-of-mouth among movie buffs, "Sons" could enjoy some success on the art house circuit.

Any love story with the curmudgeonly, cigar-sucking Fuller as the object of its affection is way to the odd side of the scale. And this scruffy story brims with curious, lifelike oddities. Set in New Jersey and Northern France, it's not your normal movie or family saga.

SONS
Pacific Pictures Corp.
Producer Marc Toberoff
Director Alexandre Rockwell
Screenwriters Alexandre Rockwell, Brandon Cole
Director of photography Stefan Czapsky
Editor Jay Freund
Art director Virginia Fields
Music Mader

Color/Stereo

Cast

Mikey William Forsythe
Ritchie D.B. Sweeney
Fred Robert Miranda
Father Samuel Fuller
Florence Stephane Audran
Tranvestite Jennifer Beals
Hospital roommate William Hickey

Running time — 88 minutes

No MPAA Rating

In Alexandre Rockwell and Brandon Cole's rough and juicy screenplay, we see the struggles of a New Jersey family of three sons (all by different mothers) trying to eke out a living in the water filter business. Well, at least two of them are: the elder, balding Fred (Robert Miranda) frazzled by a life of noisy desperation, and the peach-faced Ritchie (D.B. Sweeney), set out to sell in dying sales territories. Mikey (William Forsythe), well, he drinks a lot and has loony romantic ideas, the goofiest of which is to take father back to Normandy to visit his World War II love; he thinks it will put one last spark in the old man's dull, nursing-home eyes.

They manage to do it, mainly because they're so scattered and disorganized; rational, stable families would never attempt such a nutball undertaking. Although fraught with improbabilities and minor plot inconsistencies, "Sons" careens along on the strength of its ribald and earthy humor and its generous dollops of real-life, New Jersey-style family flavorings. Undeniably, it looks low-budget and dark, but director Alexandre Rockwell's poetic

compositions are earthy delights.

Similarly, the acting is naturalistic and no frills: Miranda, as the bedeviled oldest sibling, is a terrific blend of contradictions as the struggling macho head, while Sweeney as the dewey-eyed youngster Ritchie is captivating. Forsythe captures the loving and impractical nature of the brother who catalyzes the trip.

Fuller, white hair swept back and lethal cigar in hand, infuses a granite-like strength and dormant energy in his depiction of the still-vital old man. William Hickey, as his hospital roommate, is terrific. His raw, impartially frank pronouncements are dead-on bursts of brute wisdom.

The cinematography of Stefan Czapsky, with his fine and funny eye, add color and substance to this good, idiosyncratic movie.



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Sons

(Comedy/Drama — Color)

A Pacific Pictures production. Produced by Mark Toberoff. Directed by Alexandre Rockwell. Screenplay, Rockwell, Brandon Cole. Camera (color, DuArt Film Lab), Stefan Czopsky; editor, Jay Freund; art direction, Virginia Fields; music, Mader. Reviewed at the Cannes Film Festival (Market), May 14, 1989. (No MPAA Rating.) Running time: 88 min.

Mikey William Forsythe
Ritchie D.B. Sweeney
Fred Robert Miranda
Father Samuel Fuller
Florence Stephane Audran

With: Judith Godreche, William Hickey, Bernard Fresson, Jennifer Beals, Shirley Stoller.

CANNES — “Sons” is a lively, funny and well-acted indie lensed between New Jersey and France. Three sons take their incapacitated father (played by the redoubtable Samuel Fuller) on a trip to Normandy to find his long-lost love. Director Alexandre Rockwell communicates his affection for the characters, giving their loud-mouthed clowning a deeper dimension. Proper handling should put this one over.

Opening introduces Fred (Robert Miranda), a hot-head small-time businessman; Mikey (William Forsythe), a sentimental, out-of-work eccentric; and Ritchie (D.B. Sweeney), the youngest brother and go-between.

Pop (Fuller) is in a VA hospital, paralyzed from a stroke. His roommate (William Hickey) knows the old man wants to go back to Normandy, where he met a French girl during the war. Mikey decides to take him there.

Action switches to France, where all three sons go along on Fred’s cash. Bearing no physical or temperamental resemblance to one another (they have different mothers), they have constant clashes, yet convey an underlying sense of affection, especially toward their father.

All is done in spicy vernacular dialog with fine comic thesping from all hands.

Pic indulges in an exotic picture of Paris, its dives and transvestite bars (most attractive transvestite is played by none other than Jennifer Beals in a cameo). Normandy, when they get there, is equally scenic, though the obvious fabrications are partially excused as New Jersey’s idea of Europe.

Not all of it works, and Fuller’s final meeting with his old flame, played by a severe Stephane Audran, is emotionally barren.

Yet pic’s good humor gets it over credibility humps — like Fuller’s

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convenient demise in Normandy, and brother Mikey’s decision to stay and work for baker Bernard Fresson and his fetching daughter Judith Godreche.

Film is technically quite good overall, with Stefan Czopsky lensing most of pic and Virginia Fields’ sets. Music by Mader keeps up a pleasantly ironic beat.

Yung.