

Zita

Dennis Raymond

Six years ago, Robert Enrico directed the award-winning “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” This short film told of a condemned man during the Civil War who, seconds before he is about to be hanged, fantasizes his escape. Enrico’s current “Zita,” at the Studio New Center through December 18, carries this same theme even further.

Zita is a beautiful old woman, deeply loved by her niece, young Annie. The aunt suffers a severe stroke, and at night, as Zita wavers between life and death in her apartment, Annie goes out to try to forget approaching death.

Annie becomes involved in the city and its people; she visits a discoteque, chases a wild ram through the streets of Paris, is almost gang-raped, meets a young musician, and goes to bed with him.

Amidst all this, there is a fantasy sequence in which Annie and her musician return to the countryside home of her youth. There they find Aunt Zita, elegant, happy, and quite lovely in her red shawl and finery.

The following morning, Annie returns to the apartment, now capable of facing her aunt, who has died during the night.

“Zita” is made with such feeling, knowledge, and tender loving care, that it qualifies as an almost perfect movie. Like the fading photographs that open this film, “Zita” seems to belong to our memory even before it’s half over.

It is a heavily nostalgic and romantic work, refreshing because the romanticism is genuine and not contrived. I just wish Enrico had refrained from using slow motion photography: it’s a cheap and quick method of attaining instant poetry.

But “Zita” has the power to move you without making you feel ashamed afterwards. This in itself is an unusual achievement in movies today. Annie is played by Joanna Shimkus, and although she has neither the depth nor talent to effectively convey the conflicting emotions of her character, she does express a moving fury of energy to escape the inescapable.

Katrina Paxinou is Zita. She is remarkably soft and delicate, and I can’t really separate Miss Paxinou from her role. She is marvelous.

Some may find “Zita” too superficial, too insignificant, but it only seem superficial. “Zita” is a remarkable little film, as muted and delicate as it is personal. And I use the word “little” not in a negative sense, but as a term of admiration, protection, and affection.

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