

Charming the Hearts of Men



by Phyllis Chesler

How did such a delicious movie appear in 2021 with so little fanfare? Last night, relaxing with a friend, we gave the film our usual five minute try-out but we stayed until the very end, absolutely rooted to our spots, beaming with pleasure. One might view this as a fairy tale update to “Gone With The Wind,” a film about a very different kind of Scarlett.

Set in 1963 in a small southern town, the film is about both the civil rights and women’s rights movement—but, despite its considerable gravitas, in terms of anti-black racism and the most enraging sexism (I remember how it was back in 1963), the film miraculously manages to be light, beautiful, vintage-perfect, and quite charming. It employs all the southern stereotypes (the failing plantation, the ever-loyal black servants, the unfailing charms of a Southern Lady, the white racists) in a redemptive way.

The sophisticated, well-dressed, twice-divorced daughter of a

smalltown judge (played brilliantly by Anna Friel), discovers she is totally broke and is about to lose her family home. What happens next is an absolute wonder. She calls upon her Congressman (played by Kelsey Grammar) to add "sex" to the Civil Rights bill and, miraculously, the bill passes. Our penniless heroine, after trying to be an "Avon" lady accepts a job as a hostess, starts racially integrating the restaurant where she works, makes the front pages, and then goes on to interest all the desperate and broken women, both white and black, in building an integrated bar and restaurant which rescues them all from poverty, homelessness, and prostitution.

Directed and written by S.E. Rose aka Susan Rose, and produced by her and by her partner Richard T. Lewis, she elicits great performances from Pauline Dyer, Starletta Du Pois, Aml Ameen, Curtis Hamilton, Tina Ivlev, etc. The feminist Alice Paul (Diane Ladd) makes a cameo appearance. Oh watch it. It is an Ode to American greatness.