It’s Leasure Time

But Courtney Love works hard for her honey in The People vs. Larry Flynt

February 1, 1997 By Erik Meers

As mutually exclusive as the words Courtney Love and Oscar might at first seem, the connection has been made by more than a few wags in Hollywood recently. Critics are lauding Love’s star turn in *The People vs. Larry Flynt* -- in which she plays HIV positive Althea Leasure, a bisexual stripper and heroin junkie who marries Hustler publisher (and unlikely constitutional warrior) Larry Flynt. Leasure died of AIDS in 1987.

The movie couples the quirky stylings of Czech director Milos Forman (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*) and screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski, who penned the cult classic *Ed Wood*.

Leasure meets Flynt, played by Woody Harrelson, at a dreary Cincinnati strip club. Flynt, a budding capitalist inspired by Leasure, dreams up a raunchier-than-thou skin mag called *Hustler*. It’s a partnership made in Falwellian Hell: Leasure shares her husband’s passion for nubile women and for brainstorming new ways to shock the socks off mainstream society -- “Why not do a photo shoot of Adam and Eve making it in the Garden of Eden?”

But heavy drug use takes its toll on the couple. Flynt is able to quit; Leasure continues to inject drugs and is eventually diagnosed with HIV, presumably from sharing needles. Love’s death scene has been described by critics as “searing.” Though devastated psychologically by Leasure’s death and physically by an assassination attempt, Flynt barrels on as one of the first people to take on the ever-growing power of the Christian right.

Love could very well follow Tom Hanks and become the second person in four years to earn a Best Actor nod for playing a PWA. But Oscar’s attention depends on whether Academy members can distance themselves from Love’s much-publicized battle with heroin. “There’s got to be resistance,” an industry source told *Entertainment Weekly*. “Even on her best day, [Love] looks like a heroin addict.”

FILM
***Room* Service**

Speaking of the Oscars, a spate of movies based on Broadway productions are set for release this winter-prime time for consideration by the Academy. *The Crucible*, *I’m Not Rappaport* and *Evita* are finally making big screen debuts that have been years in coming. It leaves one wondering how

Scott McPherson's *Marvin's Room* -- a black comedy about a woman with leukemia who nevertheless cares for her dying father and dysfunctional family -- reached the multiplex a brief five years after the show's Off Broadway premiere.

Marvin's first break came when the film rights were snapped up by Robert De Niro and superproducer Scott Rudin (*Clueless*, *The Firm*). Rudin convinced Jerry Zaks, with whom he worked on the Broadway show *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, to direct Marvin as his screen debut. Unfortunately, it still wasn't fast enough for McPherson, who died of AIDS in 1992 shortly after completing work on the screenplay.

But the clincher, as always in Hollywood, was star power. Producers signed an ensemble of A-list actors, led by De Niro, Meryl Streep, Diane Keaton and Leonardo DiCaprio.

With such a collection of big names on the *Marvin* set, a clash of the titans was inevitable. Rudin wanted Miramax co-chair Harvey Weinstein to hold the film until after the release of *The First Wives Club*, another Rudin production, because he felt that *Wives* would re-electrify costar Diane Keaton's fading fortunes. "There were times when we thought we were going to kill each other," Rudin told *Variety* of his fights with Weinstein. "But I like somebody you can fight with. He's a good opponent." Buzz is that all the creative friction could pay off on Oscar night.

SHORT TAKES

Taylor Fitting

Proving once again that she'll do anything to raise more money for AIDS research, Elizabeth Taylor is turning her 65th birthday into a television spectacle. The extravaganza, called *Happy Birthday, Elizabeth -- a Celebration of Life*, will be staged on February 16 in Los Angeles. The show, which airs at the end of the month, will feature the Liz's celeb friends.

Bandstanding

Roger Spottiswoode, director of the film version of Randy Shilts' AIDS epic *And the Band Played On*, is directing the next James Bond movie. The film will again star Pierce Brosnan as 007.

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