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## FILM REVIEW; Moviemaking on the Ice: Lights, Camera, Zamboni

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

Ankles buckling, arms flailing, faces frozen in concentrated terror as they wobble perilously onto the slippery floor, the many characters who are novice skaters in Jean-Philippe Toussaint's comedy "The Ice Rink" have all they can do to remain upright.

This giddy comic conceit, one of the cleverest since the invention of the banana peel, has enough continuing clout to keep Mr. Toussaint's small, deft comedy on its feet even though it is repeated again and again. There is a sadistic pleasure to be gleaned from the spectacle of adult professionals trying to maintain their dignity while clumsily slipping and sliding. Put the bossiest C.E.O. on ice skates, and he can turn into an instant incompetent.

Because "The Ice Rink," like Truffaut's "Day For Night," is a movie about the making of a movie, the mishaps afflicting the film crew serving an imperious director and an unscrupulous producer determined to complete their film in time for inclusion in the Venice Film Festival become a delicious spoof of moviemaking and its pretensions. The work in progress, dumbly titled "Dolores," is a tacky little hockey romance whose story its director (played by Tom Novembre) insists is a metaphor for modern European history.

Although amusing, "The Ice Rink" lacks the grand sweep and humanity of Truffaut's masterpiece. The movie, which opens a one-week engagement today at Anthology Film Archives, is a loosely connected series of jokes and sight gags about the making of a film whose plot is too nebulous to describe.

The endless retakes of a single scene in which an actor, awkwardly lowered from an elaborate contraption onto the ice so that his head hits the surface at the very moment he catches a first sideways glimpse of his true love, slyly equates filmmaking obsessiveness with ineptitude.

Leading the roster of egotists who slip, slide or glide (if they can skate) through the movie is its director, who remains suavely in control as one accident after another curtails his mobility until he ends up in a wheelchair. He is more than matched in self-regard by his beautiful, ruthless female star (Dolores Chaplin, the granddaughter of Charlie Chaplin), who, within moments of arriving on the set, has sparked a sexual competition by putting the moves on both the director and her rugged American co-star (Bruce Campbell), with whom she tumbles into a flaming backstage affair.

Also shoving their egos into the mix are the deceitful producer (Marie-France Pisier), who lies to the film festival's selection committee about the project's readiness (some of the final editing is done aboard a helicopter bound for Rome to meet the deadline); and the ice rink's vain, preening director (Jean-Pierre Cassel), a former skating champion who wastes everyone's time by telling anecdotes and showing film clips of his glory days. Funniest of all is the actress's stand-in (Gilbert Melki), a stout, hirsute stunt man ludicrously outfitted in a red dress that matches the star's.

Oh, yes, there's also a Lithuanian hockey team, which doesn't speak French. For its scenes on the ice, the director instructs it to play without a puck. "The Ice Rink" builds to a nifty final swirl as the filmmakers, in their mad rush to meet the deadline, interrupt the filming of a grade-C sword-and-toga epic at the Italian studio Cinecitta when their helicopter touches down on the set. At the same moment, the gravely ill film festival chief arrives by ambulance for his private screening.

If its pieces don't completely fit, "The Ice Rink" has sophisticated comic performances by a cast who know their characters well enough to make us like them in spite of their self-absorption. While portraying moviemaking as one of the silliest activities on earth, "The Ice Rink" also makes us want to be there in the heart of all that foolishness, quaking in our skates.

### THE ICE RINK

Directed by Jean-Philippe Toussaint; in French, with English subtitles; director of photography, Jean-Francois Robin; edited by Ludo Troch and Anne Argouse; music by Brahms, Bowie and Placebo; produced by Anne-Dominique Toussaint and Pascal Judelewicz, with

Les Films des Tournelles, Le Studio Canal Plus, Les Films de l'Etang, RTL/TV1 and Fandango; released by Interama Inc. At Anthology Film Archives, 32-34 Second Avenue, at Second Street, East Village. Running time: 87 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Tom Novembre (Director), Mireille Perrier (Assistant), Marie-France Pisier (Producer), Bruce Campbell (Actor), Dolores Chaplin (Actress), Jean-Pierre Cassel (Ice Rink Director), Dominique Deruddere (Chief Operator) and Gilbert Melki (Stand-In for Actress).

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