

## TV's Duchovny Turns Film Director in 'House of D': Rick Warner

(Review. Rick Warner is the movie critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

By Rick Warner

April 15 (Bloomberg) -- Before he started chasing aliens on 'The X-Files,' David Duchovny pursued a doctorate in English literature at Yale. Then he caught the acting bug, dropped out of school and eventually became a TV heartthrob.

Duchovny returns to his more serious roots in 'House of D,' a melancholy story about a man looking back at his troubled childhood in New York's Greenwich Village during the 1970s. Duchovny wrote and directed the film -- his debut in both jobs -- and also plays Tom Warshaw, an expat artist in Paris who decides he must make sense of his past before he can secure his future.

While it's not exactly an original idea, Duchovny manages to squeeze some comedy and pathos from the shallow script, along with superb performances by his real-life wife Tea Leoni (as a depressed widow) and Anton Yelchin (as the young Tommy). Too often, though, Duchovny trips over the fine line that separates moving from mawkish.

His worst decision was casting Robin Williams in yet another sappy, overly sentimental role -- this time as a retarded school janitor named Pappass who helps his pal Tommy make deliveries from the local butcher shop. Facial contortions, strange speech patterns and lines like 'I have a huge penis' may be invaluable tools for a standup comic, but they're no substitute for acting.

The movie's title is short for House of Detention, a women's prison where Tommy and Pappass bury their butcher-shop earnings under a manhole cover. (This was the 1970s, after all, when muggings in New York were as common as porno shops in Times Square. It's also the era when Duchovny was growing up in Greenwich Village.)

### Advice From Hooker

Standing on the street one day, Tommy strikes up a conversation with a loud-mouthed prostitute (Erykah Badu) locked up on an upper floor of the detention center. Though she can't see him without sticking a broken mirror out her cell window, the inmate freely dispenses advice on dating, dancing (she tells him to practice with a lamppost) and other matters of critical importance to a 13-year-old boy.

The relationship seems silly and implausible: A hardened black hooker befriendng a naive white boy who can't even see her sounds more like a bad sitcom than a coming-of-age story written by a near-Ph.D. in literature. (It gets more unbelievable when the grownup Warshaw returns to New York and tracks down the woman, who has miraculously morphed into a kindly old grandma.)

#### Tortured Love

What redeems the movie is the twisted yet unbreakable bond between Tommy and his chain-smoking, pill-popping mom, who is still grieving over the death of her husband. Though Mrs. Warshaw is still coherent enough to serve Brussels sprouts and encourage her son to stay in Catholic school, she needs mothering even more than he does. After she overdoses into an irreversible coma, a cousin from Toronto arrives to take care of the boy, who quickly realizes he must flee to survive.

Leoni and Yelchin, who plays the voice of sanity as the psychiatrist's son on Showtime's ``Huff,' ' have great chemistry. Whether they're eating, talking or sharing a bathroom -- in one Freudian scene, mom uses the toilet while her son showers --their tortured love is inescapable.

It's almost enough to make you forget the abysmally contrived ending that finds Warshaw, his French wife and their young child bicycling around New York after he returns to find the hooker and the retarded friend that he left behind years ago. Yuck.

``House of D,' ' from Lions Gate Films, opens today in New York and Los Angeles.

--Editors: Hoelterhoff, Schatz, Wolfson

Story illustration: For more cultural news from Bloomberg, see {MUSE <GO>}. For more information on ``House of D,' ' go to <http://www.houseofdthemovie.com>

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