

Document Citation

Title	Against the wind
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2000 Nov 20
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	15
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Controvento (Against the wind), Del Monte, Peter, 2000

Variety 11/20-26/2000

AGAINST THE WIND

(CONTROVENTO)

(ITALY)

An Istituto Luce release of a Poetiche Cinematografiche/Controvento Film production, in association with Tele-Piu and Istituto Luce. Produced by Andrea de Liberato, Carlo Pontesilli, Peter Del Monte.

Directed by Peter Del Monte. Screenplay, Gloria Malatesta, Claudia Sbarigia, Del Monte. Camera (color), Saverio Guarna; editor, Simona Paggi; music, Paolo Silvestri; art director, Tommaso Bordone; costumes, Metella Raboni; sound, Tullio Morganti. Reviewed at Sacher Cinema, Rome, Nov. 1, 2000. Running time: 98 MIN.

With: Margherita Buy, Ennio Fantastichini, Valeria Golino, Maria Monti, Stefania Marsala.

By DEBORAH YOUNG

Another of Peter Del Monte's melancholy, lyrical tales about the impossibility of two people connecting in a meaningful, lasting way, "Against the Wind" wallows in life's downside: Its only note of hope is a character who learns to cry. Despite a strong cast, both theme and treatment are too downbeat to take pic far. Still, helmer's reputation as an indie maverick may attract foreign viewers, who will appreciate his sensitive handling of a difficult subject.

Blond Clara (Margherita Buy), a mousy, repressed psychiatrist who works in a mental hospital, is the diametric opposite of her raven-haired sis, Nina (Valeria Golino), a turbulent actress unable to put her life in order. Men flee from Nina: an ex-lover, ex-husband and even her little

son, who lives with Dad. In a clever sleight-of-hand, scripters connect these physically and psychologically unrelated sisters through a man whose love they share.

Leo (Ennio Fantastichini) is an oafish hospital orderly full of endearing eccentricities — like attending AA meetings for the company. While looking forlornly for Nina, he insinuates himself into Clara's loveless life and kindles a fire in her heart. Their offbeat romance lasts until Nina comes back.

After a spate of more varied roles, including Giuseppe Piccioni's "Out of This World," Buy has finally shaken off being typecast as the quintessential neurotic female. She shows greater nuance in portraying Clara as a middle-class spinster who brushes off men because they're duller than she is, and her gradual warming to the totally unlikely Leo is very human and comprehensible.

As the chronically rootless, dissatisfied Nina, Golino plays for tragedy with all stops out. Fantastichini, the only one with a (weird) sense of humor, constructs a character so clownishly whimsical that all tragedy seems to bounce off him.

Refined images by cinematographer Saverio Guarna, shot in a rainy Turin, go in for major shadow effects: Metaphor has its limits, and it is irritating to squint at scenes in a hospital that's dark as a tomb. A stirring, full-of-life musical score by Paolo Silvestri lightens up some of the film's drizzling melancholy.