

Document Citation

Title	Amy
Author(s)	David Rooney
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1998 Jun 15
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	105
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Amy, Tass, Nadia, 1998

AMY

(COMEDY-DRAMA — AUSTRALIAN)

A Village Roadshow release (in Australia) of a Cascade Films production. (International sales: Beyond Films, Sydney.) Produced by Nadia Tass, David Parker. Co-producer, Phil Jones.

Directed by Nadia Tass. Screenplay, David Parker. Camera (color, widescreen), Parker; editor, Bill Murphy; music, Philip Judd; original songs, Nick Barker, Judd; production designer, Jon Dowding; costume designer, Christiana Plitzco; sound (Dolby), Dean Gawn; assistant director, Bob Donaldson; casting, Cameron Harris. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (market), May 15, 1998.** Running time: 103 MIN.

Amy Enker	Alana De Roma
Tanya Rammus	Rachel Griffiths
Robert Buchanan	Ben Mendelsohn
Will Enker	Nick Barker
Sarah Trendle	Kerry Armstrong
Zac Trendle	Jeremy Trigatti
Bill Trendle	William Zappa
Luke Lassiter	Torquil Neilson
Wayne Lassiter	Sullivan Stapleton
Mrs. Mullins	Mary Ward
Anny Buchanan	Susie Porter
Dr. Urquhart	Frank Gallacher

By DAVID ROONEY

An emotional drama about grief and healing, "Amy" centers on the fanciful premise of a traumatized child whose elective mutism allows her to hear and speak only through song. Straddling straight drama, comedy and elements of musical fantasy, the film sits at times uneasily between those genres. Paradoxically, given director Nadia Tass and her writer-



THE HEALING TOUCH: *Rachel Griffiths and newcomer Alana De Roma co-star as mother and daughter in Nadia Tass' "Amy."*

producer partner David Parker's track record with quirky comedy ("Malcolm," "The Big Steal," "Mr. Reliable"), the lighter moments are less satisfying here than the moving dramatic core, which is powered by a typically forceful performance from Rachel Griffiths.

While the uncertainty about quite what type of film it wants to be makes "Amy" commercially no easy sell, it boasts a considerable marketing hook in its 9-year-old star, Alana De Roma, an acting novice who plays the title character and whose remarkable singing voice has since earned her a recording contract.

Amy has been a deaf-mute since witnessing the death of her rock star father, Will (Nick Barker), in an electrical accident that took place while he was performing at an open-air concert under heavy rain. This is related gradually, first in the terrific, video-shot title sequence, and later in the sustained memory flashes of his embittered widow, Tanya (Griffiths). Having withdrawn with her daughter to her father's outback farm to grieve, she is forced back to Melbourne after three years by child welfare officers attempting to take Amy's treatment and schooling in hand.

They move into a run-down house in a working-class neighborhood peopled by drunks and losers, where Amy's peculiar trait of being able to communicate through music is discovered by luckless musician Robert (Ben Mendelsohn). Convinced that the meddling welfare bureaucrats' approach is the worst thing for her daughter, Tanya continues to avoid them with the aid of her neighbors.

While the low-rent suburban setting and its colorful locals recall one of the director's best films, "Malcolm," they jar here with the central family drama, as do such whimsical touches as a chorus of singing cops.

Both Griffiths and Mendelsohn are natural, effortless performers, and together with instinctively expressive De Roma, they cast a harsh light on the abrasive mugging of some of the supporting cast. While there's evidence of re-cutting, and Mendelsohn's character in particular seems to have lost something in the process, many of the pic's problems could still be tempered in the editing room. By drawing out the drama and reducing some of the ill-fitting frills that surround it, the film could be improved immeasurably.

Where it needs no improvement is in the visual department. Doubling as cinematographer and making fine use of widescreen, Parker creates a rich textural field of grainy concert footage, the warmer light of the magnificent countryside and the grimmer tones of the Melbourne suburbs. Philip Judd's music adds emotional depth and the songs, written and performed by well-known Oz musician Barker, also are a key contribution.