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Love Streams

(U.S.-COLOR)

Winner from John Cassavetes

Berlin, Feb. 26.

An MGM/UA Entertainment and Cannon Group release of a Cannon Film Production. Produced by Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, executive producer, Al Ruban. Directed by John Cassavetes. Features entire cast. Screenplay, Cassavetes, Ted Allan, based on the play by Allan; camera (Metrocolor), Ruban; editor, Georg Villasenor; music, Bo Harwood. Reviewed at the Berlin Film Festival (competing), Feb. 26, 1984. Running time: 136 MINS.

Sarah Lawson	.....	Gena Rowlands
Robert Harmon	.....	John Cassavetes
Susan	.....	Diahnne Abbott
Jack Lawson	.....	Seymour Cassel
Margarita	.....	Margaret Abbott
Albie Swanson	.....	Jakob Shaw
Debbie Lawson	.....	Risa Blewitt
Ken	.....	John Roselius
Agnes Swanson	.....	Michelle Conaway
Eddy Swanson	.....	Eddy Donno

Closing film at the Berlin Film Festival, John Cassavetes' "Love Streams" (note: picture won the Golden Bear) shapes up as one of the filmmaker's best, both artistically and commercially, in some time. Emotionally potent, technically assured and often brilliantly insightful, the picture is guaranteed to generate controversy and critical wranglings. It's a work of great ambition and, as with his earlier films, likely to divide reviewers into two distinct camps with no one sitting on the fence.

Reflecting the title, the plot begins with two separate flows. Robert Harmon (Cassavetes) is a successful writer from the Gay Talese school currently researching the subject of love for sale on a first-hand basis. Inter-cut is Sarah Lawson's (Gena Rowlands) story — an emotionally erratic woman proceeding through a divorce and custody case.

Despite the seeming incompatibility of their two worlds, one waits and wonders how the two principals will eventually meet. When Sarah and her mountain of luggage arrive at Robert's door, the assumption initially is to take her as a former wife. Only later do we learn that they are brother and sister. Still, before these two currents converge, there's considerable emotional terrain to be explored. Robert is revealed as a pushy, unpleasant sort who nonetheless has his better points.

Presumably, for his novel, he's turned his home into a girls' dorm which he surprisingly dismantles when a former wife arrives unannounced with their 8-year-old son. This circumstance opens up a vivid exploration of his efforts to be a real father countered by his strong instincts to maintain a certain lifestyle.

Sarah's situation is markedly different. Despite good intentions, she trips herself up during the custody hearing. Thus, her husband, Jack Lawson (Seymour Cassel) winds up victorious in court. The casting her suggests a continuation of Cassavetes' 1971 "Minnie And Moskowitz," although no direct antecedents are implied to that story.

So, while Robert takes his son to Las Vegas to effect a reconciliation of sorts, Sarah is in Europe attempting to sort out and carve out a new life for herself. Both efforts prove less than wholly successful with Robert concluding life is a "series of suicides, divorces and broken kids."

"Love Streams" is never as dour as Robert would like to picture it, thankfully. When the two characters are, in their opinion, at the end of their tether, they have each other. And in Cassavetes and Ted Allan's story, this allows them to perform some crazy, out-of-character actions which are indeed life-affirming.

One can nit-pick about the picture's length and use of repetition but these are minor points in the overall strength of the production. The dramatic rollercoaster ride of frightening and funny moments leave little room for indifference. Cassavetes' films will never attract enormous numbers but there's no reason this film cannot surpass the excellent returns of "A Woman Under The Influence" with proper marketing of critical reviews and the exploitation of powerful word-of-mouth response.

Fears that Cassavetes would be swallowed up and spit up unrecognizable by the Cannon Group simply are untrue. The film bears his unique signature of visceral drama with extra ordinary, natural performances and unfussy, vivid images. "Love Streams" is a considerable artistic achievement from the Cassavetes' canon. —*Klad.*