



kam on film

by Kam Williams

Reverential Biopic Revisits Life Of Free-Spirited Renaissance Woman

Altina
First Run Features
Unrated

Altina Schinasi (1907-1999) was lucky enough to be born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth. The youngest of three girls, her parents were Sephardic Jews of humble origin who immigrated to the U.S. from Turkey in the late 19th century.

Thanks to the tobacco fortune soon amassed by their industrious father, the sisters were raised in the lap of luxury on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Although headstrong Altina wanted for nothing, she proved to be something of a rebel, opting to study art in Paris after graduating from a prestigious prep school, rather than follow the conventional path of a pampered debutante.

That was just the first of many unorthodox choices on the part of the free-spirited trendsetter en route to making her mark on the world not only as an artist and inventor, but as a feminist and civil rights advocate who would march with Dr. Martin Luther King. She was also a bit of a Bohemian in terms of her private affairs, being admittedly driven by insatiable urges stronger than the societal taboo against adultery.

Tawdry scandals aside, Altina accepted



four proposals of marriage over the course of her life, the last from the Cuban artist Tino Miranda, a handsome hunk less than half her age. Though then well into her golden years, she had her Latin lover marveling at her "stamina of a 25-year-old."

Besides a healthy libido, Altina was perhaps best known for designing the harlequin eyeglass frame, a cultural contribution for which she won the 1939 American Design Award. Still, the talented Renaissance woman's accolades for her innovations and sculptures brought her less satisfaction than doting on her two sons, Dennis and Terry.

All of the above is recounted in entertaining fashion in *Altina*, a reverential biopic directed by Peter Sanders (*The Disappeared*). The fascinating documentary's only flaw is that it leaves you wanting to learn more about its intriguing subject.

A frustrating tease of a tribute that seems to merely scratch the surface of an overprotected child of privilege-turned-irrepressible bon vivant.

Very Good (3 stars)
In English and Spanish with subtitles
Running time: 80 minutes

Elvis Impersonator Showcases His Talent In Faith-Based Musical

The Identical
Freestyle Releasing
Rated PG for smoking and mature themes

What if Elvis Presley's stillborn twin had survived his mother's pregnancy rather than passed away during delivery back in January of 1935? That is the alternate reality contemplated by *The Identical*, a faith-based musical marking the underwhelming directorial debut of Dustin Marcellino.

Unfortunately, Dustin tapped an Elvis impersonator to star in his revisionist version of events, a dubious decision that comes back to bite him whenever Blake Rayne isn't singing and shaking his hips on stage. The first-time actor plays both Ryan Hemsley and his identical sibling, Drexel (Elvis), in this fictionalized account of the life of the King of Rock and Roll.

The speculative endeavor's point of departure is Decatur, Georgia, during the Depression, which is where we find poverty-stricken sharecroppers Helen (Amanda Crew) and William Hemsley (Brian Geraghty) fretting about how they're going to provide for their twin newborns. The answer to their prayers arrives soon thereafter, at a revival meeting pitched under a big tent by Reverend Reece Wade (Ray Liotta), a Pentecostal preacher with a soulful of hope and a barren wife (Ashley Judd).

The Wades' desire to start a family conveniently dovetails with the Hemsleys' having one more baby than they can reasonably afford. So, with God as their witness, Reece and Louise agree to adopt Ryan before surreptitiously slipping out of town and back to Tennessee. Meanwhile, Helen and William announce the missing boy's death to friends and relatives, and stage a faux funeral, complete with an empty casket.

Reece proceeds to raise Ryan in the church with a career in ministry in mind although, given his great vocal cords, the kid proves more comfortable in the choir than the pulpit. He finally rebels in his teens entirely by enlisting in the military, leaving not only his domineering



dad but a budding sweetheart (Erin Cottrell) behind. By contrast, Drexel, who was also blessed with powerful pipes, is allowed by the Hemsleys to pursue his passion, and naturally blossoms into the nation's next singing sensation.

Will the twins ever learn of each other's existence? If so, will they be able to forgive their folks for having separated them at birth? And will Ryan ever enjoy an opportunity to take his own shot at fame and fortune?

These are the probing questions posed by a production so flawed in terms of plot, dialogue and performances that it ends up unintentionally funny at practically every juncture. Regrettably, *The Identical* flunks the basic plausibility test, whether in terms of its farcical reimagining of race relations in the Jim Crow South or its equally-silly staging of sophomoric car chases straight out of *The Dukes Of Hazzard*.

To paraphrase a Presley classic: Wise men say, only fools rush in to see a one-trick pony revolving around an annoying Elvis look-a-like.

Fair (1 star)
Running time: 107 minutes

Opening This Week

Dolphin Tale 2 (PG for mature themes) Cetacean sequel chronicles more true stories from the annals of Florida's Clearwater Marine Aquarium. Cast includes Harry Connick, Jr., Ashley Judd, Morgan Freeman and Kris Kristofferson.

No Good Deed (PG-13 for violence and profanity) Crime thriller about a charming stranger (Idris Elba) who terrorizes a stay-at-home mom (Taraji P. Henson) and her kids after gaining entry to their home by claiming to have car trouble. With Kate del Castillo, Leslie Bibb and Henri Simons.

Search Party (R for drug use, sexuality, graphic nudity and pervasive profanity) Road comedy about two buddies (T.J. Miller and Adam Pally) who come to the rescue of a just-dumped groom-to-be (Thomas Middleditch) left naked in the middle of the Mexican desert. Featuring J.B. Smoove, Lance Reddick and Alison Brie.

108 Stitches (R for profanity and sexual references) Ensemble comedy about a lousy college baseball team that schemes to go out on a high note after learning that the school president (Kate Vernon) plans to disband the program at the end of the season. Cast includes Bruce Davison, Erin Cahill and retired major leaguer Roger Clemens.

Archaeology Of A Woman (Unrated) Justice delayed drama about a daughter (Victoria Clark) who unexpectedly uncovers clues to a long-unsolved crime of passion while caring for her mother (Sally Kirkland) suffering from Alzheimer's. With James Murtaugh, Karl Geary and Mary Testa.

Atlas Shrugged: Who Is John Galt? (PG-13 for violence and sexuality) Third installment in the ambitious adaptation of Ayn Rand's 1,200-page opus stars Kristoffer Polaha as the title character, the man supplying the answer for the nation's impending economic collapse. Featuring Stephen Tobolowsky, Rob Morrow and Laura Regan.

Bird People (Unrated) Romance drama about a jaded, Silicon Valley engineer (Josh Charles) who quits his job and breaks up with his wife while in Paris on business in order to pursue a passionate affair with his young hotel maid (Anaïs Demoustier). With Roschdy Zem, Camelia Jordana and Geoffrey Cantor. (In French, English and Japanese)

Born To Fly (Unrated) Dance documentary chronicling the gravity-defying choreography of the legendary Elizabeth Streb.

The Disappearance Of Eleanor Rigby: Them (Unrated) Final installment of the simultaneous trilogy, set in NYC, revolving around the trials and tribulations of a young couple (James McAvoy and Jessica Chastain) struggling to save their marriage in the wake of a tragedy. Ensemble includes Viola Davis, William Hurt, Isabelle Huppert and Bill Hader.

The Drop (R for graphic violence and pervasive profanity) Screen adaptation of *Animal Rescue*, the Dennis Lehane short story about a lonely bartender (Tom Hardy) who launders cash for local mobsters only to become the focus of the police investigation in the wake of a robbery gone wrong. With Noomi Rapace, John Ortiz and the late James Gandolfini.

The Green Prince (PG-13 for mature themes and disturbing images) West Bank documentary about Palestinian informant Mosab Hassan Yousef, the son of a founder of Hamas who converted to Christianity and became a spy for Israel after being arrested as a teenager for throwing rocks at soldiers. (In Hebrew and English with subtitles)

My Old Lady (PG-13 for mature themes and sexual references) Family skeletons dramedy about a down-and-out New Yorker (Kevin Kline) who inherits a Paris flat occupied by a mother (Maggie Smith) and daughter (Kristin Scott Thomas) with a secret connection to his recently deceased father. Support cast includes Elie Wajeman, Dominique Pinon and Stephane Freiss.

The Skeleton Twins (R for profanity, sexuality and drug use) Dysfunctional family drama about long-estranged fraternal twins (Kristen Wiig and Bill Hader) who are inspired to repair their damaged relationship after cheating death on the same day in separate incidents. With Luke Wilson, Ty Burrell and Boyd Holbrook.

Take Me To The River (PG for smoking, mild epithets and mature themes) R&B retrospective revisiting the influence of Memphis and the Mississippi Delta on soul music. Featuring appearances by Snoop Dogg, Bobby Blue Bland and Booker T. Jones.