

## Brattle Theatre Film Notes: All The Real Girls

USA, 2003. R. 108 min

**Cast:** Paul Schneider, Zooey Deschanel, Patricia Clarkson, Shea Whigham; **Writers:** David Gordon Green, Paul Schneider; **Music:** Michael Linnen, David Wingo; **Cinematographer:** Tim Orr; **Producers:** Jean Doumanian, Lisa Muskat; **Director:** David Gordon Green

roads transforms both of them.

In some ways, Paul and Noel's story is universal, a timeless parable. Yet, they come across uniquely complex people, particularly as portrayed by Schneider and Deschanel. As *The New York Times* A.O. Scott describes them, Paul and Noel are "at once gawkily real and luminously peculiar." Deschanel's performance is especially compelling. Paul's transformation has occurred before the film's first scene, but Noel's transformation happens before our eyes. When she does something that shocks Paul (and the audience), it is a testament to Deschanel that we still

Remember how overwhelming, exciting, and scary it felt when you fell in love for the first time? How everything seemed topsy-turvy? Well, director Green and co-writer/star Schneider remember. "All the Real Girls" is a dead-on evocation of first love in all its poignancy and intensity. Jury members at the Sundance Film Festival awarded it a Prize for Emotional Truth this year – one of the rare times when an awards ceremony has gotten it right.

The film is set in a small factory town in the North Carolina Appalachians, and begins with a first kiss. Paul (Schneider) is 22, a smart but lazy guy who has spent his youth fixing up old cars, drinking cheap beer with his buddies, and sleeping around. He's a little stunned at his sudden, deep feelings for Noel (Deschanel). Noel is the sister of his best friend and is back in town after six years at a girls' boarding school. At 18 years old, she is not too much younger than Paul but light years apart in experience. Counter to his prior Don Juan approach, Paul wants to take this new relationship slow, to let the romance unfold delicately. Noel, a virgin, is ready to dive into life – to fall in love, to drink, to flirt, to get a little wild. Meeting at this cross-



find the character sympathetic and actually even more intriguing than before.

On the one hand, it's hard to believe Green is only 27 – he's such a confident, cogent filmmaker. On the other hand, he's not much older than his characters and perhaps has greater respect for the seriousness of their situation. As Roger Ebert wrote in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "Most movies about young love trivialize and cheapen it. Their cynical makers have not felt true love in many years and mock it, perhaps out of jealousy. They find something funny in a 20-

year-old who still doesn't realize that he is doomed to grow up to be as jaded as they are. Green is 27, old enough to be jaded, but he has the soul of a romantic poet."

Many other critics were captivated by the charms of "All the Real Girls," as well as Green's first movie, "George Washington" (2000). (Incidentally, the Brattle was the only local theater to play "George Washington.") Both films share a distinctive episodic structure and visual style. The plots unfold quietly and languidly, in a series of vignettes interrupted by meditative portraits of the local landscape that give equal weight to the town's ramshackle buildings and the Appalachians' natural beauty.

Both are also set in North Carolina and primarily focus on poor or working-class people, offering nuanced perspectives on an underrepresented facet of modern America. After seeing "All the Real Girls," compare it with other recent films set in the South – "Sweet Home Alabama" (2002) and "Cookie's Fortune" (1999) come to mind. Sure, the characters in Green's universe have colorful names like Bust-Ass, Elvira, Bo, and Tip. They speak with drawls, chew tobacco, drive rusty old jalopies, and eat in diners. But they are not buffoons. Green takes them very seriously. They have a lot to say – even when they're talking about nothing in particular. We should listen.

- written by Sarah Morris



## Brattle Theatre Film Notes:

---