

reel reviews

★ ★ ★ *Light of Day* Oaks East Six

The one minor quibble I had with the otherwise excellent *Back To The Future* was Michael J. Fox's performance as Marty McFly. I recognized too many of the mannerisms and tics he employs in *Family Ties*, and I felt Fox was coasting on his charm, rather than trying to create a new character. I wondered if he were capable of anything more than glib, congenial comedy.

All those doubts are shunted aside by *Light Of Day*, a serious and uncompromising drama about family, love and redemption. From the first shot of Joe Rasnick's long hair and dirty feet, we know this character is far removed from Alex P. Keaton. Fox delivers a strong, convincing and original performance that proves he is a capable and talented actor.

My admiration for Fox increased because *Light Of Day* is not a "Michael J. Fox movie." Joe may be the emotional center of the film, but the real action revolves around his mother (Gena Rowlands) and his sister, Patti (Joan Jett).

The family conflict is dramatized early in the film when Joe and Patti, who live together and play in a band called the Barbusters, visit their parents' house for their mother's birthday dinner.

Joe leafs disinterestedly through the religious magazines that line the coffee table, while Patti, dressed in leather, sits next to him, moody and uncomfortable. She treats her mother's question, "How are the roads?" meaning the band's touring, with scorn and derision. But Joe manages to keep everyone appeased and fairly amicable.

But during dinner, Mom — as mothers often will — pushes her luck a little too far. She asks everyone to join her in prayer and Patti grudgingly agrees.

"God bless Patti, Joe and little Benji (Patti's fatherless child). Take care of them and guide them," prays Mom. "We ask especially that you look over Patti." She glares at Mom, but her head is bowed.

"Help her to see the error of her ways. Forgive her the sins of her youth . . ." With that Patti jumps up and charges out the door.

While *Light Of Day* focuses more on the kids, it allows us to see everyone's point of view. We certainly understand the release Joe and Patti receive from rock 'n' roll. But we also appreciate Mom's confusion and pain, even as we see her becoming older and more difficult to deal with.

Another strong plus for this movie is the abundance of warmth and love on the screen. I can't remember the last time I saw a movie in which the characters seemed to genuinely care about each other so much.

Fox and Jett create an easy, tender rapport both in the quiet scenes and during their open joy while performing on stage. When Mom (played marvelously by Rowlands), tells Joe, "You are my pride and joy. I just thank God He gave me two children," we can see his quiet pain.

Some very dramatic revelations are made near the end of this film, especially concerning the father of Benji, whose identity only Patti knows.

Those plot developments might have turned the movie into a soap opera, but the twists are handled realistically and without pretense. In fact, some scenes are so on target they send shivers up the spine.

Light Of Day was written and directed by Paul Schrader, a man who's had more luck as a screenwriter (*Taxi Driver*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) than as a director (*Cat People*).

It isn't perfect; two very minor "dumb blonde" characters and one scene in which Patti speaks too intellectually about her love of music don't ring true. But *Light Of Day* is certainly Schrader's greatest achievement to date.

Its most interesting characteristic is the music. We might expect the scenes on stage to be bursting with vitality and energy. With Jett as singer, the Barbusters should seem like the Next Big Thing.

But that isn't the case. The band is certainly talented,



but no more than other bar bands like them all across the country. For Patti and Joe, we see the music as a release, rather than a path to imminent fame and fortune.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the title song, written by Bruce Springsteen and performed at the very beginning of the movie. It's fun, but nothing remarkable.

However, when "Light Of Day" is performed again at the very end, it seems almost like an anthem. The lyrics ("And I got a little lost along the way/But I'm just around the corner to the light of day") seem to comment on what happened during the film.

When Patti and Joe charge into the tune, it's a moment of hope and joy, even in the face of sadness and despair. At the end of *Light Of Day*, the music means as much to us as it does to them. And that's quite an accomplishment.

By Michael Giltz