

Leonard Matlin's **MOVIE CRAZY** Leonard's Picks

SWEET LAND — It's the time of year when even the so-called independent movies seem to have major backing as they campaign for awards and critical attention. In the midst of this onslaught a genuine indie product like *SweetLand* may have a difficult time staking its rightful place in the consciousness of the public, but it's as deserving as any film this year. I'm especially happy to see that it has received two nominations in the upcoming Independent Spirit Awards, including one for Elizabeth Reaser as Best Actress.

First time feature writer-director Ali Selim has painted a rich, subtly textured portrait of one woman's experience as an immigrant coming to Minnesota in the days following World War One. In a mix-up one can well imagine occurring back then, this mail-order bride is not Scandinavian, as promised, but German, which not only causes embarrassment to her

would-be husband, a simple farmer, but ostracizes both of them from their community. Neither the priest nor the local magistrate will perform a marriage ceremony, forcing the man and woman to navigate their own, challenging path.

There is nothing hackneyed or familiar about *Sweet Land*, in its screenplay or in the way it's presented. Selim and his gifted actors use nuance and silence as much as dialogue and music to tell their story. Reaser, who's been working for some time, is a revelation here, and she is matched by Tim Guinee as

the would-be husband who's not much on conversation but who ultimately knows what he wants and what he's willing to stand up for. Alan Cumming, John Heard, Ned Beatty, and Lois Smith add their considerable talent to the ensemble.

Most of the big Hollywood movies will be around for a while; *SweetLand* may not, unless you support it while it's playing in theaters. It offers a fresh and invigorating experience.

Leonard Matlin

