

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN LONELY?

by Annetta Marion



James Mangold's *Heavy*, an independently-produced film about a fat, small-town pizza chef with big dreams, is perfectly and succinctly named. The opening chords of the film are heavy and measured. The weight (both physical

and psychological) of the characters is burdensome. The film's pacing, which flawlessly depicts the air and attitude of the small, upstate New York town, is beautifully deliberate; heavy and slow. *Heavy* explores the usual, dark but cheery, small-town

oppression hidden as love. A powerful, directorial marvel, *Heavy* is one of the best films to see this summer; that is, if you've ever been lonely.

Heavy offers us a voyeuristic look into the seemingly plain lives of a few people tied together and weighed down by Pete and Dolly's, a roadside bar and pizza joint. The camera is a perfectly-still fly on the wall; it doesn't intrude or move quickly; it simply observes. The characters are not playing for the camera, they are only being themselves.

Mangold, through his spectacularly understated direction, observes the life of Vince, a friendless and overweight man stuck in both his domineering mother's home and roadside bar. Vince is hopeful, but he is paralyzed by the predictability and the stagnation of the people who surround him. His mother, Dolly, personifies such complacency; fifteen years after her husband's death, she still has not changed the name of the diner from Pete and Dolly's; she still employs Delores, the resigned and resentful waitress, despite some long-standing tension between the two women. Nothing has changed, that is, until Dolly hires Callie, a plainly stunning, sensitive college drop-out. Callie is a sort-of stumbling soul herself and her presence at Pete and Dolly's changes everything. Suddenly, all prior bets are off.

The heavy-hitting performances by the entire cast harmoniously complement Mangold's stellar and poignant direction. From our first glimpse of Liv Tyler as Callie apologetically and unhopefully applying for the waitress position at Pete and Dolly's, she is sweet and nervous; backward yet slowly becoming aware of her sexual power. Shelley Winters' character of mom and bar owner is potent (you can even smell death on her in the hospital close-up) and appropriately captured by one of Callie's many Polaroid pictures. Deborah Harry, playing the worn-out waitress Delores, is convincing and seasoned. But Vince (painfully and perfectly played by Pruitt Taylor) steals the show. He completely dominates the screen with his presence; physically, yes, but more importantly, emotionally. His pain and want are so big; they rush at you through his constantly-moving eyes which contradict his large, immobile body. You can almost physically touch his emotions. They leap off the screen and directly into your heart.

This first feature by Mangold is an outstanding and ingenious example of American independent film making. He studiously uses carefully-collected visuals to tell his heartfelt story. The dialogue is sparse; in particular Vince says almost nothing at all.

Many different people from the popular music scene contributed to *Heavy* thanks to Tyler's mom-turned-professional-manager, Bebe Buell. Evan Dando, guitarist and songwriter for the beloved, post-punk Lemonheads, convincingly plays Callie's self-centered mechanic and musician boyfriend. Liv Tyler is the daughter of Aerosmith's lead singer Steven Tyler. Thurston Moore, co-founder of the ingenious and consequential noise of Sonic Youth, wrote *Heavy*'s original score. And last but certainly not least, is Deborah Harry, lead singer for the ultra-cool, power-pop group Blondie, as the desperate waitress, Delores, who has been there forever.

Heavy began as a film that "we didn't have enough money to finish shooting when we started." Notwithstanding that meager beginning, the film went on to win the Special Jury Prize for Direction at the 1995 Sundance Film Festival. *Heavy* had its theatrical premier June 5 at the Film Forum in New York city and was held over, and held over again to play to the large crowds. So from there, and now here to you, *Heavy* will keep making its slow, careful, plodding way into all of our hearts. After all, who is not familiar with loneliness?