

# FILM

## RAMBLING ROSE

Director: **Martha Coolidge**

Calder Willingham has provided American cinema with some of its more interesting films, from Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* to Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man*. Now, through the efforts of director Coolidge, his autobiographical novel *Rambling Rose*, comes to the screen, as a showcase for the talented Laura Dern.

This is the tale of a fey young girl growing up in the care of a very traditional Southern family in a small Georgia town during the Depression. One might expect something of the spirit of Tennessee Williams, although *Rambling Rose* has none of the playwright's penchant for baroque theatricality. Still, having just watched Manke-

wicz's 1960 film of Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer*, with the script bending over backwards to be discreet about its sexual content, it was refreshing to see the sheer honesty and directness of a scene in *Rambling Rose* in which the 13-year-old son of the family excites Dern to the point of orgasm. A scene, it should be said, that is presented with humour and compassion.

Coolidge has compared her film to *Mary Poppins* and *Bagdad Cafe* as being one in which an extraordinary person comes into some ordinary lives, and Laura Dern's Rose is certainly such a person. The actor knows how to deal out fluttering mannerisms (her trip into town in a skimpy dress is hilarious), but Rose is more than a mere compendium of Southern camp.



Laura Dern is wild at heart in *Rambling Rose*

day tale as the elderly Jessica Tandy relates this story to a positively rapt Kathy Bates.

The first is a sensitively handled piece, beautifully played by Mary Stuart Masterton and Mary-Louise Parker. On the screen any overt lesbianism has been toned down (by Fannie Flagg, scripting from her own novel) but, to my mind, this does not detract from the emotional truth and credibility of the women's relationship. There are moments of lurid melodrama (particularly those involving a loutish, wife-beating, racist husband who also runs round in Ku Klux Klan robes), but, after all, this is, or was, the South.

The present-day story has more problems. Kathy Bates, endlessly snacking on Twinkies and the like, and listening wide-eyed to wily Jessica Tandy, knows how to harvest chuckles from an audience, but it's all rather easy. One laughs as Bates wilts at the thought of examining her own vagina during a women's group session, rams some bimbos' Cadillac at the Mall and starts breaking up, quite literally, her domestic cage, but afterwards one feels a little uncomfortable about why one is laughing. And isn't it time that we had a moratorium on Tandy's cute/crusty old ladies.

WILLIAM DART

So it is with Diane Ladd, Dern's own mother, who plays the mother of the family. Watch for a marvellous scene in which Ladd stands up for Dern's rights when a sinister doctor is determined to have surgical redress on what are seen as the young girl's sexual problems. Ladd is also an effective foil to Robert Duvall's rather crusty, laconic father, eccentrically given to

turns of literary eulogy in his speech.

WILLIAM DART

## FRIED GREEN TOMATOES

Director: **Jon Avnet**

*Fried Green Tomatoes* is really two films in one: there is the tale of the relationship between two young women, Idgie and Ruth back in the thirties, told in flashback, and the modern-

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BEST DIRECTOR - David Cronenberg.

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