

The Cast of "The Whole Wide World"

by Kathleen Carroll

Robert E. Howard was a mama's boy from deep in the heart of Texas who dreamed up lusty tales about such swaggering macho heroes as Conan the Barbarian. A roaring success as a pulp fiction novelist, Howard was an eccentric loner who did not function well in social situations. Still, in 1933 the volatile writer met Novalyne Price, a prim young schoolmarm with writing aspirations of her own. Despite a mutual attraction they were never able to fully commit to each other.

Director Dan Ireland gently recreates the emotional highs and lows of this true-life story of unrequited passion in "The Whole Wide World." Howard and Price are, in Ireland's own words, "two people who love each other so profoundly they can't say those three words." The movie records each slight and rejection with such touching realism the audience can actually feel the pain and frustration of these would-be lovers.

Ireland has also chosen his cast wisely. Vincent D'Onofrio truly deserves an Oscar nomination for his combustible performance as Howard. Alternating between macho gusto and boyish tenderness he manages to be both intimidating and appealing. Newcomer Renee Zellweger exudes a spunky independence as Price.

Film Scouts caught up with both actors during a recent press junket. Having gained weight to play the beefy Howard, D'Onofrio was looking more like his handsome self. He summed up his career plan by saying "I've always tried to stay out of the limelight and just do my work."

At the point at which he might have become a star, the actor went to Europe in search of more challenging projects. "If I wanted to make movies like my father used to show me - like "Carnal Knowledge", these movies were only being made in Europe, so I went there until people like Bob Altman called me," he explained.

Although he has some regrets about not simply opting for "the money," D'Onofrio has built a strong reputation by taking on the most challenging roles. "I just like to push the envelope these days," he said. "Why not? I'm 37 years-old."

He was so committed to this particular project that he took on an additional role as the movie's co-producer. "It was good for me to learn that I could be an artist and a businessman at the same time," he concludes.

Howard and Price express their pent-up passion in a single kiss. A reporter noted that the kiss "had such promise." "That's because Renee and I are such great kissers," declared D'Onofrio. "Our kiss is pretty

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movie-stylish."

The other great kisser, Zellweger, wore a proper skirt and sweater to meet the press but her legs remained bare - a sure sign that she's still a country girl at heart. "Howdy," said this adorably unassuming Texan. She described her reaction to being hired at the last minute to play Price. "It wasn't just a film," she admits. "It's my dream come true. It was like fate dust was sprinkled over the whole thing."

Zellweger also seems to have been sprinkled with fate dust. Her work in "The Whole Wide World" helped to earn her a major role opposite Tom Cruise in "Jerry Maguire." Looking positively kittenish as she discussed Cruise, Zellweger purred "Yeah he's kind of starry isn't he?" But this future star, whose favorite word is "awesome," promised her listeners that "nothing's going to change for me."

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