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'The Romantics' is nice looking and a good film, to boot

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MOVIE REVIEW

THE ROMANTICS Seaside secrets. Running time: 95 minutes. Rated PG-13 (profanity, drug use, sexual content, partial nudity). At the Union Square.



Having once dubbed themselves "The Romantics," an octet of exiles from a tribal nation called Yale have descended upon a country house on the Long Island Sound to unpack ancient flirtations and attend a wedding. Before any troths can be pledged, though, it must be acknowledged that the maid of honor slept with the groom. For five years.

As the best friend to the bride, Lila (Anna Paquin), [Katie Holmes](#) effectively relaunches her career. Girlish yet careworn, her character Laura shuffles

in wondering why her old friends keep asking her if she's all right. The last time she saw the groom (Josh Duhamel) was the day before he proposed to Lila. To clear the idea with her? No. "He didn't mention it," she says.

"The Romantics" takes a while to find its footing — the lack of talent of Elijah Wood, as an irrelevant pup who is forever sniffing around Laura, gets in the way, and there is a bit of awkwardness as everyone fills in back story.

THE ROMANTICS IS THE MOST STYLISH MOVIE OF THE YEAR

Malin Akerman nails the flouncing ways of the failing actress whose ebullience is exhausting. But the rest of the friends — Adam Brody, Jeremy Strong and Rebecca Lawrence — are sketchy, and their story lines don't go anywhere.

But as the night dreams on and the sound sighs and purrs, the atmosphere of charged possibility comes to feel like "A Little Night Music." Writer-director Galt Niederhoffer, who adapted her own novel, is at her best in several sharp one-on-one confrontations about real problems, such as male indecision.

Duhamel's Tom, a Ph.D. candidate and swim champion, has a habit of waking up after perfect nights to panicked mornings. "Ambivalence is a disease, an actual mental illness," Laura tells him, and what unmarried woman would disagree? Yet she can hardly be expected to resist a guy who looks like J. Crew and talks like J. Keats.

"The Romantics" isn't as consistent or as well-rounded as its parent, "The Big Chill," or as entertaining as its less literate but more extroverted cousin, "St. Elmo's Fire," but with its tart dialogue and its perfect ending, it is sensitive as well as sagacious. It's a rare combination.

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