

## REVIEWS SKIP SHEFFIELD

**"Two Lovers" Joaquin Phoenix's Masterpiece**

## BROKEN HEARTS

## WILL RELATE

By Skip Sheffield



## SOCIETY EDITOR

"Two Lovers" is Joaquin Phoenix's masterpiece.

It's good to cut to the chase, because there has been so much speculation about Phoenix's bizarre behavior and his claim "Two Lovers" is his last film.

I hope it's just a publicity stunt, because we need actors as good as Phoenix to distract us from our own troubles.

It helps to have a broken heart to appreciate director James Gray's script (based on a Dostoyevsky story) and Phoenix's anguished performance.

The film begins with a half-hearted suicide attempt. A man jumps off a bridge at Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. As he sinks to the bottom he has a change of mind and struggles to surface, where he is rescued by passersby.

He refuses help and flees when informed the police have been called. Clearly he's been there before.

Leonard Kraditor (Phoenix) is a good Jewish boy who went off the deep end a couple years ago when his fiancée broke their engagement over things he could not control or change.

After a previous suicide attempt, Leonard's parents (Isabella Rossellini and Moni Monoshov) had him committed. He is only recently out of the institution, and on medication for bi-polar disorder.

Mom and dad feel what Leonard needs is a good Jewish girl. So they fix him up with Sandra Cohen (Vinessa Shaw), who just so happens to be the daughter of the man who wants to buy dad's dry cleaning business.

Michelle is lovely and quite sexy, but when Leonard spies a shiksa goddess in his apartment building, he is thunderstruck.

Her name is Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow) and she is as screwed up as he is.

Not the least of Michelle's problems is that she is having an affair with a married man who pays for her apartment.

Gray calls his film "a direct

assault on the subject of love," and he hits the bull's-eye.

I was shaken, not stirred by this film, and I mean that in a good way.

**Play the game**

It's great to see Andy Griffith well and working again.

That's the best I have to say about "Play the Game," which is also about the game of love.

There are two main characters: Joe (Griffith), a resident of an assisted living facility still pining for his late, sainted wife, and David (Paul Campbell), his 28-year-old grandson.

David works for his dad (Clint Howard), selling exotic cars, but his real expertise is in the field of love.

Dave teaches Joe the by-the-letters trick of The Game, and Joe proves a surprisingly adept student.

Writer/Director Marc Feinberg was inspired by his on

grandfather, a resident of one of South Florida's Century Villages.

It's reassuring to know the game is never over until it's over.

**The Class**

"The Class" is an at times brutal documentary-style film about prejudice in Parisian high schools, set in a racially-mixed school.



Joaquin Phoenix and Gwyneth Paltrow

There is open hostility between the Caucasian students and recent Muslim and African immigrants.

"The Class" is like a grittier, more realistic version of "To Sir with Love," without the sentiment. Director Laurent Cantet

lets the movie run on too long. It's based on the novel "Entre les Murs" (Between the Walls) by Francois Begaudeau, who also wrote the screenplay.

It is definitely not a waste of time.