

Utterly charming Leading Lady



By [Daniel Dercksen](#)

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Leading Lady leads the way for the future of South African filmmaking, with writer-director Henk Pretorius delivering a romance that is heartfelt and entertaining.

Worlds collide and cultures clash as an idealistic prim-and-proper English teacher (Katie McGrath) in London goes to the extreme to land the role of an Afrikaner war heroine for a major film. It all seems rather straightforward until she meets a rugged farmer (Bok van Blerk), who makes it impossible for her to realise her dream, and maybe steal her heart.

For Pretorius: "The story uses a British actress to give a very unique and interesting perspective on South Africa. I really like looking at 'us' through this lens and more specifically the Afrikaner community. To me, South Africans are quirky and have the ability to laugh at themselves. The story effortlessly entertains the international, the South African English and the local Afrikaans market."

There is only thing anyone can ever ask of a great love story, and that is a fairy-tale princess, handsome Prince Charming, fairy godmother and sly villain. Leading Lady delivers on all levels.



A solid performance

McGrath is perfectly cast as the 'Leading Lady' in search of happiness, with Van Blerk delivering a solid performance as the wounded hero, also adding his unique musicality to the role. Brümilda van Rensburg is sensational as the caring, but sometimes overbearing, mother who will do everything to rule her kingdom, with Gil Bellows in top form as the jealous boyfriend and filmmaker who uses his power to control his minions.

The chemistry between McGrath and Van Blerk is pure magic, turning an ordinary love story into a full-blooded romance, one that remains with you long after you leave the cinema. Leading Lady is ultimately about the power of love and the spell it casts on its colourful characters; it's about finding love in the most unusual and unexpected places and the journey we take to be loved, share love and explore the control it has over our emotions.



Never too late to love

If there's one thing you can take away from *Leading Lady*, it's that it is most definitely never too late to love, and that one should never be too afraid of being loved.

Is Pretorius a romantic at heart? "Not really, no," he confesses. "I see the point in pair bonding, where a relationship benefits both parties and is mutually beneficial to both parties' growth, but I am not the butterfly and fluffy poetic type of guy. I think I use to be like that, but life has a way to scalp our expectations into mathematical equatable emotional transactions, so my outlook in terms of romance is usually to live as much as possible in the moment and not to add the unnecessary pressure of expectation to the mix.

That is exactly what *Leading Lady* allows us to do, to realise how important it is to make the most of what we have and not be too serious when it comes to matters of the heart.

Pretorius is not only a great storyteller, but also a proficient story maker, turning the delightful screenplay he co-wrote with Tina Kruger into a visually arresting cinematic experience (shot by Trevor Calverley), turning the world of his story into spectacular enchantment - will we ever forget the magnificent staging of the concert in the barn?

Exploration of different cultures

As with his teenage rom-com Bakgat films, and Fanie Fourie Se Labola, Pretorius grounds Leading Lady thematically with issues related to the search of identify and the exploration of different cultures; they're issues Pretorius understands well and explores with finesse and understanding.

Says Pretorius: "I think Leading Lady is the ultimate feel-good film with a coming-of-age film that explores Jodi's journey in finding her own value and significance. These are all relevant themes to me at the moment, as a filmmaker trying to make his mark in the international arena."

Leading Lady has an incredible nostalgic depth, which Pretorius contributes to "the rich history between the British and the Afrikaner/South African culture".

"I really looked at the archetypical British person and tried to make her as universally identifiable as possible, without alienating her from her culture. Everything in Leading Lady is conveyed as honestly as possible; we really aimed to tell a gentle story with as much cultural depth as possible. I also feel that the Afrikaans culture has a very interesting and unique history that form their current ideologies and I have tried to delve into these idiosyncrasies emotively without making the film didactic."

Leading Lady is not about becoming a star, but poignantly shows how easy it is to take control of our lives and find our place in this world.

After watching the film we all want to live in that caravan on a farm away from the hustle and bustle, where we can enjoy the most of what has been given to us.

If you are looking for a film that will put a smile on your face, make sure to see Leading Lady, it offers humorous escapism into a story that is very close to our hearts, and one that will most definitely make you feel good about caring compassionately and the strength of loving.

ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

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