

musical number. And both Ingrid and Loretta's stories tie in to that of Magnuson's career-minded Miriam, who hosts a Home Shopping Network-type show in which she gives advice to women about relationships and motherhood, while her own personal conflicts strip away the soft-focus purr of her onscreen life.

Reconciling new and old is the basis of *Woman's Picture*: In all three stories, Pera's characters struggle to escape the confines of their past, culminating in a transformative moment. But it's far from a "chick flick"—the love of the "right" man does not save the day. Pera's nod to the genre is subtle and reverent, from the characters' old-Hollywood names to the way he lingers on their stunning, pained faces. He manages to connect their moments of frailty and identity without devolving into campy tribute, adding something new to the canon while staying true to the women who inspired him. —AUDRA SCHROEDER

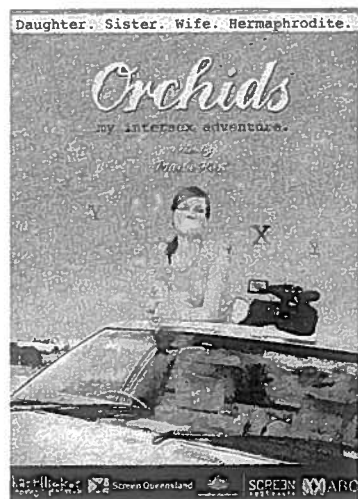
ENJOY IT WITH: A nice, stiff Manhattan.

ORCHIDS: MY INTERSEX ADVENTURE

Director: Phoebe Hart
{WOMEN MAKE MOVIES}

The orchid takes its name from the Greek word for testicle, *orkhis*, a reference to the distinct appearance of the flower's bulb. But what blossoms from this subterranean gonad is a flower of delicate beauty, a perfect natural example of how genders combine in a single entity. For this reason, "orchid" has become a word adopted by many in the intersex community, and Phoebe Hart's documentary of the same name aims to explore how members of this community cope with the assumptions and imperatives that accompany them through life.

Hart was diagnosed with androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS)



at the age of 5; her younger sister, Bonnie, was discovered to have AIS as well. However, neither child was told they were intersex until they were teenagers, and even then they did not find out about each other until into their college years. (Both sisters underwent surgery to have their undescended testes removed on the chance that they might become cancerous, but were told to tell other people the surgery was for a hernia.) Since those days of confusion and secrecy, each sister has found ways to move forward and make peace with her identity.

Orchids is a road-trip movie: The sisters set out across Australia to connect in person with a group of friends from online support groups, and to persuade their parents to speak about their experiences raising intersex children. The road scenes (complete with shaky handheld car-interior shots and cuts to dead bugs on the car's grille) contrast with scenes from Hart's own marriage and quest to adopt a child.

Hart is sweet and straightforward; her sister, on the other hand, comes across as brash, sharp, and wounded. Bonnie vents her anger through rage-fueled performance art involving chainsaws and rubber genitals, which she says helps her stay sane. In one scene she brandishes a clear, ovular chunk of plastic and explains her problem with dilators given to people



with AIS to stretch their vaginas in preparation for intercourse. ("Why not give us something that looks sexual? You want me to run around making out with washing machines?")

Bonnie traces her anger to her childhood of veiled truths and outright lies. So when their mother finally agrees to be interviewed, having refused the cameras for most of the film, it's powerful. And, in fact, she's no monster—just a parent who was unprepared for what she was asked to do. AIS affects only about one in 20,000 babies, and most doctors were more interested in the girls as medical phenomena than in helping them live happy, comfortable lives; Mrs. Hart recalls she was on her own when it came to how, and when, to explain AIS to her daughters.

Ultimately, *Orchids* settles into an exploration of the ways that many intersex people are made to feel—wrongly—that a "normal" life is a contentment they can never achieve. In meeting their online contacts and discovering their common experiences and frustrations, the Hart sisters see, as Bonnie puts it in her own memorable way, that "nothing in nature is normal. We're a fucking example of that." —SARA STROO

PERFECT FOR: The film buff who always checks the "New Documentaries" section of Netflix first.

MARTHA MARCY MAY MARLENE

Director: Sean Durkin
{FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/CUNNINGHAM & MAYBACH FILMS/FILMHAVEN ENTERTAINMENT/BORDERLINE FILMS/THIS IS THAT PRODUCTIONS}

The alliterative logjam of *Martha Marcy May Marlene's* title is just the first brilliant sign indicating where its heroine's story is heading: into the tangled haven of a cult and its unfolding labyrinth of sex, lies, and manipulation.

From the start, it's clear that director-writer Sean Durkin believes in naturalistic poetry as well as a slow build. The film's seemingly bucolic opening scenes comprise images of women and men gathering for farm chores, animals grazing, and a child playing by his lonesome, while the sound of a single pounding hammer suffuses the scene with an unmistakable tension. Later, the men are shown eating—the head of the table occupied by the charismatic, wiry, and watchful Patrick (John Hawkes)—while the women wait by the stairs as if in a strange, deliberate still life. Finally one girl breaks from the pack, disappearing into the inky blackness of the roadside bushes: Martha (Elizabeth Olsen—sister of Mary-Kate and Ashley—in her first, career-making role), who spends the rest of the film looking over her shoulder, her recent past unfolding in a series of dreamlike/nightmarish flashbacks while she takes uneasy refuge in her sister Lucy's (Sarah Paulson) tony lakeside nest.

The film juggles Martha's fragile emotional state with her existential search for identity. The back-to-the-land cult Martha escapes from resides in an American gothic realm that's unnervingly claustrophobic and fully capable of murderous violence. But there's also an undercurrent of hypocrisy coursing beneath the determinedly repressed good life represented by Lucy's well-appointed home. In the

end, I
and u
what
critic
as qu
outsi
credi
swer
what
there
peop
—K I

REC
Ingr
dab
Man

WI
Dir
an
{UNI

Not
ity j
sub
tua
inte
adr
tha
out
Ch
go
bel
tio
an
to
all
thi
Mi
m
an
sty
of
ha
ar

th
re
th
rr
F
B
a
C
R