



(From left to right) Gloria (Loretta Devine), Savannah (Whitney Houston), Bernadine (Angela Bassett) and Robin (Lela Rochon) portray four remarkable women who journey through a modern labyrinth of husbands, lovers, jobs and makeovers in "Waiting to Exhale."

Twentieth Century Fox Pictures

Taking a Breather

USC students react to Twentieth Century Fox's new movie, "Waiting to Exhale"

Crowds of friends and lovers have been flocking to movie theaters across America since the Dec. 22 release of "Waiting to Exhale," the motion picture based on Terry McMillan's 1992 best-selling novel.

"Exhale," directed by Forrest Whitaker, is the story of four African-American women who encounter a series of hardships, broken hearts and less-than-desirable men, all while attempting to attain true love.

Whitney Houston (Savannah), Angela Bassett (Bernadine), Loretta Devine (Gloria) and Lela Rochon (Robin) portray four friends who look for love in all the wrong places and most often, the wrong men.

"Exhale" has earned an estimated \$53.6 million in the past four weeks. Jamie Wightman, an employee at Dutch Square Mall Cinemas, said the crowds have been steady, and patrons have been pleased with the film.

"The women seem to like it a lot more than the men, probably because some of the things the women say in the movie are degrading to men. A lot of couples have been here to see it," she said.

Reaction from USC students about "Exhale" has been mixed. Many students say they have seen the movie several times, and they feel a film about African-American women dealing with relationships is long overdue.

"I think it's a positive depiction of African-American women. A lot of the other movies made for a black audience have been located in crime infested areas. Everything in the black community is not like that," senior Kimberly Rogers said.

Both men and women disagree with the concept that "Exhale" is the male-bashing movie of the '90s. Senior psychology major Ronald Rice feels

the film does not represent the qualities and behavior of an entire race of men.

"A lot of people thought it was a male-bashing movie. Some men are like that, but all African-American men are not like those characters," Rice said.

Junior Shon Wright, who has read the novel, feels the screenplay's treatment of the male characters was less severe than in the book.

"I think they went a lot easier on the man than they did in the book," he said. "It will spark dialogue about relationships, and any movie that makes black men and women talk about their relationships is positive."

The screenplay, co-written by McMillan and Academy Award-winning screenwriter Ronald Bass, deleted several events that occurred in the book. Some students feel these details were essential to the novel's

plot and were disappointed "Exhale" didn't include them.

"I realized that there would be discrepancies between the book and the movie. Some of the characters, especially Robin (Rochon), had so much more behind them in the book," senior Winona Ross said. "I am disappointed to know that Terry McMillan was involved in the writing of the screenplay and that so many important details were left out."

Although many promotional posters and advertisements have included the photograph of the four actresses sitting side-by-side, Houston and Bassett have received the most critical acclaim for "Exhale."

Rogers feels Bassett deserves the most credit in the film for dealing with her unfaithful husband. However, she felt "the movie treated adultery a little too casually."

"I think Angela Bassett did a good job of

portraying what women who rely on men for their success go through," she said.

"Bernadine's strong sense of pride and determination shows that with perseverance, anything is possible. In the end, she did what she had to do," Rice said.

The "Waiting to Exhale" soundtrack, produced by Babyface, features an ensemble of 16 tracks by female R&B artists. Houston's "Exhale (Shoop Shoop)," which has been No. 1 on the R&B charts, is one of her three songs on the soundtrack. Aretha Franklin, Patti LaBelle and Mary J. Blige are among a host of other artists featured.

Rice feels the movie's popularity has been based on the universal issues it contains, as well as the amount of hype associated with McMillan's novel.

"I think the theme of bonding and sisterhood has brought people to see this movie," he said. "I think the movie is made for women and what they go through, regardless of color."

By Clifton Chestnut, Staff Writer

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