



# Caught up by desire

## FESTIVAL FILM

Private Fears in Public Places (M) ★★★½

Lambert Wilson, Laura Morante

Directed by Alain Resnais

Review: Mark Naglazas

Of all the great directors to emerge during the era of the French New Wave it was Alain Resnais who most consistently worked with highly regarded writers such as Marguerite Duras for *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and Alain Robbe-Grillet for *Last Year at Marienbad*.

Unlike Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, who loved to thumb their noses at the establishment by adapting trashy novels, Resnais has always had respect for classy literary source material. What's more, he served the material rather than impose himself on it, as was the *modus operandi* of the young Turks of Paris' Right Bank.

Interestingly, critic Jonathan Rosenbaum says Resnais, who is now in his mid-80s, has always hidden himself behind famed writers because he's a painfully shy man.

This gulf between our deepest desires and the role we believe society expects us to play is also the subject of *Private Fears in Public Places*, an adaptation of a play by Alan Ayckbourn, the modern master of the English middle-class comedy of manners.

Intriguingly, that repression is exacerbated by the fact that each of the six characters in *Private Fears in Public Places* is forced to live or work in close proximity with somebody to whom it is difficult to reveal their feelings.

This theme of confinement is nailed swiftly and sweetly in the opening scene in which a real-estate agent (the great Andre Dussollier) is showing a young woman (sexy Italian star Laura Morante) a new apartment for her and her boyfriend (Lambert Wilson).

The place proves to be too small — Wilson's Dan needs a study even though he's a boozey layabout ex-soldier who probably has never picked up a book in his life — and her search becomes one of the film's



Confined: Isabelle Carre and Lambert Wilson.

several very slender narrative threads.

The estate agent has two women in close to him — his seemingly prim and proper God-fearing secretary, Charlotte (Sabine Azema), and his sister (Isabelle Carre), a pretty girl who nonetheless has resorted to the personal pages to find a boyfriend.

And then there is the bartender in Dan's favourite watering hole (Pierre Arditi). He is a melancholic middle-aged man burdened with caring for his bitter, hateful old father who, in one of the film's several crisscrossing storylines, is cared for on occasions by the good Christian, Charlotte.

This frozen world — snow falls throughout almost the entire movie — starts to thaw when Charlotte gives her employer, Thierry (Dussollier), a videotape of religious songs which turns out to contain material that makes his eyes pop out on stalks and, in the film's funniest scene, a stalk almost to pop out of his pants.

Resnais uses his trademark flowing, beautifully orchestrated camerawork and seamless editing to evoke a world in which desire barely causes a ripple.

He's also chosen to shoot the film completely on a soundstage and in such a way that it looks artificial even as the snow is falling all over the streets of Paris. The snow and deliberate fairytale fakeness evokes Orson Welles' studio-era classics *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

The overall look of *Private Fears in Public Places* serves to heighten the disjunction between the

maddeningly civil surface — French formality seems even more starchy than English good manners — and the volcanic eruptions of desire that threaten to blow this storybook world apart.

**Private Fears in Public Places is at the Somerville Auditorium until Sunday. It then moves to the Joondalup Pines for one week.**