

Willis delivers heartbreaking performance

NEW YORK — In the ongoing glut of films about the Vietnam War, most have dramatized explosions on the battlefield and not on the home front. But Norman Jewison's "In Country" (Warner Bros.) reflects on the war's continuing toll on its veterans, their families and survivors, and the unfinished business of healing.

Based on the novel by Bobbie Ann Mason, "In Country" zeroes in on recent high school graduate Samantha Hughes (Emily Lloyd), whose healthy curiosity about the father she never knew — a Vietnam soldier killed in action before she was born — opens up painful family wounds.

Bright and spunky, Sam has reached a turning point in her short life in rural Kentucky. Uncertain about her future, she's waylaid by her peculiar uncle Emmett (Bruce Willis), with whom she's lived since her widowed mom, Irene (Joan Allen), remarried and moved to Lexington with her new baby. Vietnam vet Emmett has spent his years since the war as a recluse, foregoing marriage and a job for a life as a drunk riddled with Agent Orange-induced illnesses.

In an effort to connect with her father and to pull Emmett out of his shell, Sam takes on a personal crusade to learn about the war that killed her dad and battered Emmett and his vet friends. In the process, she breaks silences that have locked her mom, Uncle Emmett and her grandparents Mamaw, Uncle Emmett and her grandpaw (Richard Hamilton) in their own private hell.

Like the 1946 classic "The Best Years of Our Lives," which chronicled the uneasy assimilation of World War II veterans on the home front, "In Country" similarly touches on the crucial elements of coping and healing that must occur within families touched by war. But unlike the hero wor-



"In Country," a drama about the current generation's coming to terms with Vietnam, stars Bruce Willis as a war-damaged vet and Emily Lloyd as his niece.

ship accorded World War II veterans, Vietnam vets and their contributions to the unpopular effort were disregarded.

Previously ignored and now forgotten, Emmett and his vet friends simply can't fit into normal U.S. life again. And Sam, her mother and grandparents are as much victims of this war as those who fought or died for its cause.

The strength of Jewison's effort to update the "war at home" lies in his skill with notable ensemble casts. Jewison, the director of "Moonstruck," "Agnes of God" and "A Soldier's Story," among others, draws viewers in with his focus on the strong-minded innocent Sam, who believes all things are possible and curable.

Lloyd (also the star of "Cookie") plays Sam unlike any adolescent movie in recent memory. She's actually a three-dimensional character. Lloyd is especially remarkable as she blends Sam's typical, flighty teen concerns with those of a lonely, fatherless daughter and a tender,

concerned niece.

Also outstanding and totally unrecognizable is Bruce Willis in the role of Emmett. Willis is heartbreaking without stooping to characteristic shtick or cheap histrionics. And final kudos should go to John Terry as one of Emmett's emotionally scarred friends and to Miss Rea, who as big, comforting Mamaw recalls the archetypal farm woman enacted by Jane Darwell in "The Grapes of Wrath."

Jewison may milk sentiment during Sam's wide-eyed discovery of her father's letters and diaries and during the touching ending at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. But "In Country" is a powerful reminder that war victimizes people long after the last bullet is fired — and that to finally heal those wounds, one must reach out to family or friends and ask for a shoulder, an ear

and, most of all, for understanding.

Due to some clearly suggested sexual involvement by the young female protagonist, some rough language laced with sexual innuendoes and brief but battle-field flashbacks, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

Wired

Based on the self-destruction through drug overdose of John Belushi, "Wired" (Taurus) seems to have its own self-destructive death wish.

Earl MacRauch's muddled script shows the life of Belushi, who died in 1982, as viewed by two different narrators — an angel of death (Ray Sharkey) and journalist Bob Woodward (J.T. Walsh). Directed by Larry Peerce, the movie shifts back and forth from past to present with neither rhyme nor reason.

What comes across, however, is a clear anti-drug message. Even more clearly, the movie suggests that the entertainment world encourages drugs or at least tolerates their use. Though this may not be news for anybody, movies have rarely dealt self-critically with the topic.

Michael Chiklis gamely tries to imitate Belushi's comic routines, but his performance is lost in all the disjointed mishmash of its convoluted structure.

Because of some vivid depictions of drug and alcohol abuse as well as much senseless foul language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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