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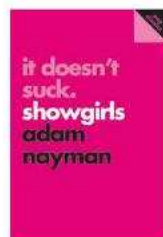
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Renowned Toronto critic and film lecturer Adam Nayman's *It Doesn't Suck: Showgirls* takes a look at the controversial film and the criticism it has received since it first showed in theaters 19 years ago.

If ever a movie still could raise a knowing snicker nineteen years after its release, its Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls*, a drama about deadly ambition set in the seedy world of a Las Vegas lap dance joint. Written by rogue trash screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, it stars Elizabeth Berkley, Kyle MacLachlan and Gina Gershon.

It cost \$45M to make an earned around \$2M. People stayed away in droves and *Showgirls* topped off its "success" with a Razzie Award for Worst Picture of 1995. But in 2014, everything old is new again.

However, Adam Nayman (Cinema Scope and POV magazines, writes for The Grid, The Globe and Mail, The Walrus, Sight and Sound, Reverse Shot, Cineaste, Elle Canada and Film Comment) says "Wait a minute!" In the book, Nayman revisits the trainwreck only to discover news of its demise was premature.



Renowned Toronto critic and film lecturer Adam Nayman takes a look at *Showgirls* and its legacy in *It Doesn't Suck: Showgirls*. @Photo by Adam Nayman

It Doesn't Suck: Showgirls goes on sale April 1st on Amazon and in Stores.

M&C: TIFF's website calls *Showgirls* "a decadent cult classic" and "lovably ludicrous" and coyly suggests it may be a classic. You say it doesn't suck but do you think that it's a classic?

Nayman: I think it's attained a kind of grandeur over the years. Considering how badly it was received in 1995, the fact that it's taken at all seriously now by critics, scholars and fans is sort of a miracle; even if the movie isn't a "classic" in the same way as, say, *Casablanca*, I would say it's a historic case – a classic case, even – of time's passage changing the way people look at cultural product. Objects in the rearview mirror do often appear larger, after all.

M&C: The film has been reviled and laughed at and mocked. But you found something to

admire about it. Why did you go to the trouble?

Nayman: Part of the reason I wrote the book is because I think there is so much to admire; the other big motivation was that so many critics had made claims to the contrary 19 years ago. There's something a little perverse in choosing to write a book about an "anti-classic" like *Showgirls*, but it seems more worth the effort – and the risk – than authoring the umpteenth appreciation of a film like *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Star Wars* or whatever.

M&C: It has been compared to *All About Eve* with its professional catfight, which is ten kinds of insanity. Or is it?

Nayman: I don't think it's insanity at all! Verhoeven called the movie "All About Evil" when he was on the set, and I think it's closer to Mankiewicz's Oscar winner than that movie's fans would want to admit – except that it focuses on the Eve Harrington figure rather than its Margo Channing manqué. Both movies are trashy, nasty, showbiz comedies that make backstage activity seem fun and dangerous – and both are satires of their era and chosen milieus. But I think *Showgirls* is probably even closer still to a film like *42nd Street* – a musical melodrama about an ingénue who gets her big chance on the big stage.

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M&C: Is it in any way erotic or sexy, looking back?

Nayman: I think *Showgirls* is anti-erotic; there's very little actual sex in it, and the sexiness of the strip clubs and stage shows clashes with how tacky everything is (and how gross all of the people prove to be in their private lives). Verhoeven is often very bold with sex and sexuality in his movies, and part of what I like about *Showgirls* is that it doesn't buy into what Las Vegas' skin-peddlers are selling – it either critiques it or jokes about it, playing up the essential ridiculousness of *The Stardust's* production numbers. There are scenes of seduction in *Showgirls* but I'd say it's more about the alienation effects.

M&C: There are many films that we view again in retrospect and we change our minds about them. Our opinions matter until they don't but the movies don't change, usually. What's at play here?

Nayman: This is a fantastic question. What's at play here is that there is a certain amount of cultural capital in claiming that "the critics were wrong"; it's always provocative to try to attack the canon and force entry for an unlikely title. I also think it's a different era, movie-wise. *Showgirls* came out the year after *Pulp Fiction*, which it's not too similar too except for the fact that it combines adult material and irony – and makes it hard to tell how seriously we're supposed to take what we're seeing. I think Tarantino opened up the playing field for "trash" to be considered "art" and even though Verhoeven predates him by decades; his work in Holland and the US has only really gotten its due in recent years, post-Tarantino.



DVD cover art for *Showgirls* and *Showgirls 2: Penny's From Heaven*. Both available now.

M&C: Kyle McLachlan has always spoken about the film with a charming kind of shame, and he works it. What did you find in your research about the stars and how they feel about it?

Nayman: I think everyone involved with the film had to be very clever about how they talked to the press, and I think McLachlan and Gershon were canny to sort of disavow their participation. But I'm more interested in the response of an ensemble player like Rena Riffel, who not only insisted that the movie was worth revisiting, but wrote/directed/starred in a sequel called *Showgirls 2: Penny's in Heaven* – a sort of low-budget homage that I discuss at length in the book.

M&C: Would Elizabeth Berkley have had a better career without *Showgirls*?

Nayman: Probably, although there is maybe something to be said for flaming out so spectacularly so soon and getting to be seen as the It Girl who had to start over from the ground up. The thing is that I think she's a pretty good actress in her way, and I've never liked the idea of laughing at her; she was in over her head in a lot of ways and the performance is not lacking in effort. I'm quite moved by Berkley's work as Nomi, albeit in ways that have more to do with feeling for her as an actress than caring about the character.

M&C: You're a brave man defending a film with a 4 out of 10 rating on IMDb and 17% RT freshness rating and it's been called "toxic". That shows great pioneering spirit. Are you prepared for any and all responses when it is seen further afield?

Nayman: Yes for sure though I'm pretty sure that the response will be positive – if not to the book, then to the movie. It might seem like I'm out on a frail little limb with *It Doesn't Suck*, but the fact is that this movie has been being reclaimed now for the better part of ten years, and I want to give credit where it's due to other writers, critics and filmmakers who've already made the case that *It Doesn't Suck*. I'd like to think that my argument is original and persuasive, and I'm glad that it appears to be a bold gesture, and yet I can't help but feel I'm even a little bit late to this particular party.

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