

Norman Loves Rose

Australia : 1980 : dir. Henri Safran : Norman Films / Direct Hit : 98 min
 prod: Henri Safran & Basil Appleby : scr: Henri Safran : dir.ph.: Vincent Monton
Tony Owen
 Carol Kane; Warren Mitchell; Myra De Groot; David Downer; Barry Otto; Sandy Gore;
 Virginia Hey; Louise Pajo; Valerie Newstead; Betty Benfield; Julie Herbert; Olivia Brown;
 Herbert Newstead; Sid Feldheim; Johnny Lockwood; Arthur Sherman; Gypsy Dorney

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5670	3.5	8	3	1,646	3	-	-	-	-	No	<i>unseen</i>



An atypical love affair? Or child sexual abuse by a female predator? I suppose it all depends how malicious one is. The only person really qualified to judge would be the boy himself, but since he's a "minor" his opinion is irrelevant. Source: The Australian Film Book

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"OK comedy of teenager Owen enamoured with sister-in-law Kane. She becomes pregnant, and who is the father? **1/2"

Australian Cinema 1970-1985 comments:

"**NORMAN LOVES ROSE**" is something of a maverick among Australian films. It is persistently *funny* about the family whereas

most of the other films concerned with young

boys on the brink of adulthood play up the



*Just the same old heterosexual hypocrisy at work – had this been a **man** Norman was having regular intercourse with, no-one would have tried to make a comedy of the situation, would they? For a boy of 12 to be deflowered by an older woman, on the other hand, is just a spot of good luck, right?*

Source: Film Yearbook vol.2

frustration and pain involved. Comedies on any theme are rare enough in the Australian cinema for "**NORMAN LOVES ROSE**" to be welcome; but to locate that comedy in middle-class (Jewish) family life was perhaps too unusual for commercial success. Norman (Tony Owen) nurses – and gratifies – an adolescent passion for his sister-in-law Rose (Carol Kane) whom he quickly impregnates whereas his brother Michael (David Downer), engaging in fearsome exercises with bowls of ice cubes, has been humiliatingly unsuccessful. Norman's barmitzvah celebrations present the family in full sail. After the religious ceremony, with the sexes carefully separated, there is a gross, noisy, cheerful party, complete with dripping ice swans and fingers grabbing food, and unconscious *double entendres* from Michael who pompously proposes Norman's health: "You will assume duties which up to now have been my father's and mine." Norman, of course, has been assuming such duties with effortless ease for some time. If that sounds tasteless, the film is not.

As much as any Australian film, "**NORMAN LOVES ROSE**" is explicitly focused on family life. If its Jewishness makes it less than typical, it is nevertheless very acute about the fine line between parental love and possessiveness, and about the pressures which family life can exert. The Jewish mother's obsession with progeny is of course a recognisable stereotype, but in the writing (Safran's screenplay) and in the warmth and humorous understanding of Myra DeGroot's performance it achieves a subtler delineation. Similarly, Warren Mitchell (a long way from his Alf Garnett persona) creates the Jewish dad with prostate trouble and hyper-anxious wife as a whole character. And there is an affecting performance from Downer as Michael, tight-

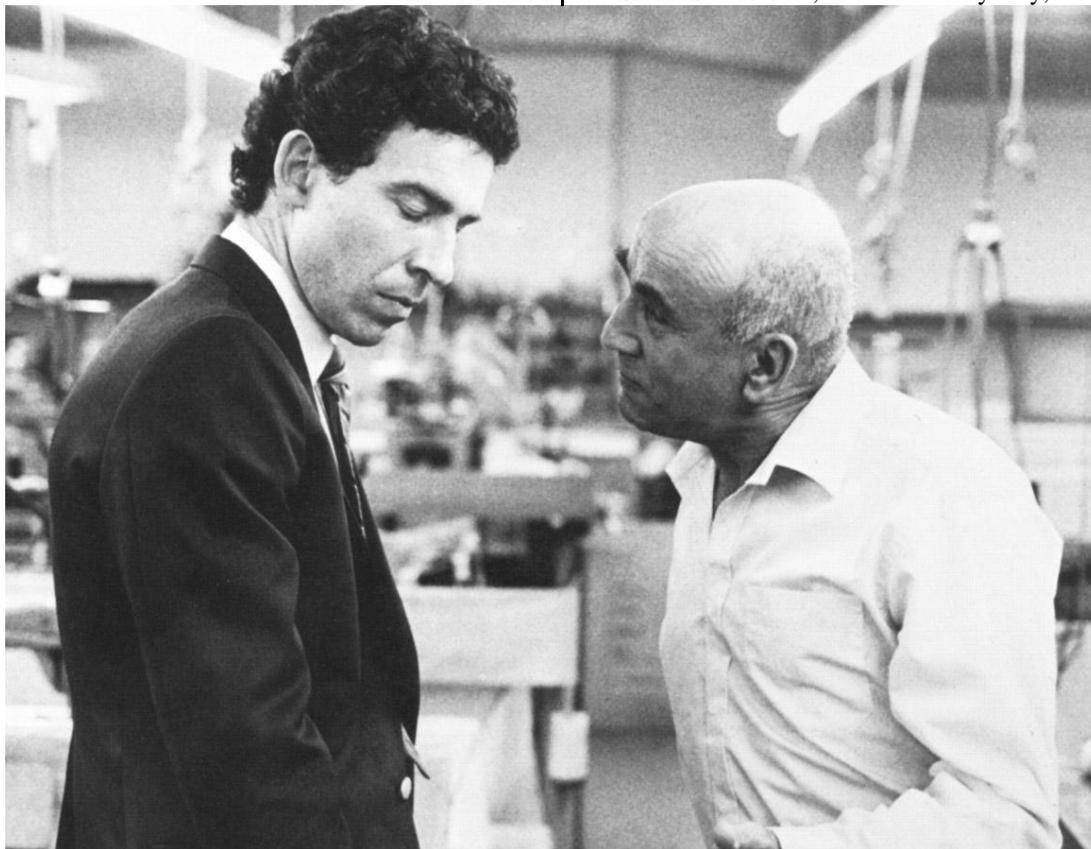
lipped and grim, doggedly and unavailingly coupling with Rose, envious of the apparent sexual triumphs of his randy dental partner Charlie (wittily and painfully understood by Barry Otto). As he recalls bitterly the Gentile girl he loved and let himself be talked out of marrying and despairs over his infertility, Downer cuts through to veins of real frustration. In doing so, he highlights Norman's seemingly effortless – and precocious [*sic – idiot!*] – adjustment to at least some of the demands of manhood¹."

"Attempts to develop films with an international appeal by playing down their Australian origins have not generally been significant, for example Simon Wincer's absurd "**HARLEQUIN**" (1980)... Richard Franklin's "**PATRICK**", on the other hand, successfully recalls Hollywood thrillers while playing down the Australian-ness of the setting. Its use of Melbourne cityscapes is no more emphatic than the use of Sydney in Henri Safran's charming comedy, "**NORMAN LOVES ROSE**" (1982, with Warren Mitchell and Carol Kane as – surely modest – guarantees of overseas distribution). The pleasures of both these genre pieces have little to do with their being Australian but a good deal to do with their re-working of genre conventions. They do not go out of their way to suppress their origins, nor do they flaunt them. Cinema audiences everywhere have for decades allowed Hollywood to represent the rest of the world in its films, whether in the use of location shooting or in calling on great studio back-lots to represent the North-West Frontier or Lourdes. Indeed, one writer has

¹ *Since when was copulating with your older sister-in-law a "demand of manhood"?*

spoken of that "corner of M-G-M that is forever England".

“...The comedies, "NORMAN LOVES ROSE" and Michael Robertson's "THE BEST OF FRIENDS" (1982), and the musical, "STARSTRUCK", are all set in Sydney, each



"Extraordinarily slow, utterly charmless Australian comedy" – David Downer and Warren Mitchell discuss Bar Mitzvahs, fertility treatments and prostate conditions
Source: *The Australian Film Book*

offering a different perspective on it. "NORMAN LOVES ROSE", one of the most under-rated films of the revival (almost the only detailed and complimentary accounts of it are Brian McFarlane's review of it in *Cinema Papers* no.40, 1982, p465, and Tom Ryan's article in *The Film Yearbook vol.2*, Melbourne: Currey O'Neil Ross Pty Ltd, 1984, Australian supplement, p8) and its *only* graceful comedy, is firmly set in well-upholstered middle-class suburbia. Its chief characters are Jewish and well-to-do, and though it uses Sydney locations un-emphatically, it is distinctively a city film in its evocation of the pressures that bear on the emotional lives of its characters; pressures aggravated by family tensions, played for comedy but, underlying this, touching and serious...."

"...As with the men, there is a rich resource in the ranks of the character actresses and, again, there is not space to do more than pick out a few of the most notable... Sandy Gore, with a strong theatrical background, steals films such

as Henri Safran's "NORMAN LOVES ROSE" (1982) and David Stevens' "UNDER-COVER" (1983) from under the noses of their ostensible stars with, respectively, an abrasive display as a soured-off suburban divorcée and a stylish display of *soignée* sophistication..."

The Australian Film Book 1930-Today
review:

"To the great delight of her husband Michael and their families, Rose becomes pregnant. They had not previously been able to conceive. Suspicion soon begins to turn on Norman, a precocious [*sic – clod!*] thirteen-year old about to take his Bar Mitzvah."

The Film Yearbook vol.2 – 1982/83 – review:

"Extraordinarily slow, utterly charmless Australian comedy about a 13-year old boy who gets his adolescent initiation [*sic*] from

his sister-in-law and fathers her baby. Full of empty caricature and tired Jewish jokes. UK opening: Sept 23; US opening: Nov 19.”

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

“Thirteen-year old Norman (Tony Owen), son of a choleric Jewish garment manufacturer (Warren Mitchell) with a troublesome prostate – a fair idea of the film’s level of humour – succeeds where his impotent dentist brother (David Downer) has failed by impregnating his vacuous sister-in-law (Carol Kane); he then tries to kill the brother via voodoo. A sniggering comedy cartooning the misery of the impotent husband and almost inciting under-age sex in its tacit commendation of the insufferable Norman. * ”

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89

review:

“An awful Australian sex comedy. Kane gives a terrible performance as a housewife who finds carnal fulfilment with a twelve-year-old. * ”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“An ill-conceived Frankenstein’s monster of second-hand jokes and worn-out caricatures,

this is a disappointment after Safran’s earlier **“STORM BOY”**. While preparing for his bar mitzvah, Norman discovers sacred encouragement for his profane interest [*sic*] in sister-in-law Rose, and seizes the opportunity presented by his mother’s absence and his brother Michael’s low sperm count. Rose becomes pregnant, but refuses to reveal Norman as the father. Norman is not happy. Only Warren Mitchell’s unerring sense of comic timing instils any humour into this banal film; the other characters cast only pale shadows upon the stifling Sydney suburbs.”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“In this Australian-made comedy, Tony Owen plays a love-struck teenager who is enamoured of his sister-in-law, Carol Kane. When she gets pregnant, the question of paternity arises. Lots of laughs in this one! Rated "R". ***1/2”

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. How the cries of “precocious” fly thick and fast whenever a person of this age does *anything* to stray from the mundane. Norman is thirteen years old – an adult by Jewish reckoning – and his penis appears to be in working order. So what is “precocious” about *that*? It’s interesting to compare reviews of this film with those of **“EL NIDO”** (“The Nest”) released the same year, in which Ana Torrent played a 13-year old girl who also initiates an erotic – though unconsummated – relationship with a 60-year old Spanish landowner. The accent in that film was on the intolerance and small-mindedness of their community toward the “eccentric” friendship. Here the social repercussions are played for comedy, and, because the boy is the one who does the penetrating, it is seen as a less egregious violation of the social tabu. In fact the closest parallel to this plot would be the earlier French comedy **“PRÉPAREZ VOS MOUCHOIRS”** (77), in which a husband is unable to satisfy his “frigid” young wife by furnishing her with a lover, but she responds immediately to the sexual attentions of a 13-year old boy (Riton) at summer camp. He too, of course, is immediately dubbed “precocious”, which translates more properly as “presumptuous”. For a more interesting social comedy with a Jewish family setting, see **“BAR MITZVAH BOY”**, in which the title character absconds from his own Bar Mitzvah in disgust at the standards of “manhood” he sees displayed by those closest to him. Nothing else is known of Tony Owen.

See subject index under **AUSTRALASIA**, **COMEDY** and **SEX & SEXUALITY**.