



GEFFEN

Beth (Jessica Lange) begins to date semi-seriously with Charles (Arliss Howard) after her husband dies in *Men Don't Leave*.

★ ★ ★ 1/2 *Men Don't Leave*
Royal Park

The title is a lie, because men *do* leave. It happens early on in this movie. Beth (Jessica Lange) and John Macauley are happily married. They are affectionate, accommodating of each other's quirks and doing a good job of raising two sons.

One is Matt (Charlie Korsmo), a quiet, polite little person who is closer to his mother. The other is Chris, a rambunctious teen-ager who bounds out of the house after patting Beth goodbye and saying, "Later, creator."

Then Dad dies. He leaves behind an unexpectedly large debt, no life

insurance policy and a large, rambling house they can no longer afford. But most of all he leaves behind Beth. It takes her most of the movie to recover from this.

At first, she seems to handle it well. Beth sells the house, the truck and moves her two sons to Baltimore — the closest city where she can hope to find a decent job with her limited experience. She finds one as an assistant manager in a gourmet food shop. Unfortunately, this means toiling under an obnoxious and condescending boss. It isn't easy, but she copes.

Her sons do less well. Young Matt hangs out with a little hoodlum who shares his last Milk Dud

by pulling out a large pocket knife and cutting it in half. They band together and start a pint-sized life of crime. Matt uses his profits to buy lottery tickets in hope of winning enough money to buy back the home — and life — he's lost.

Chris becomes more and more resentful of moving to Baltimore. He makes home life hellish for Beth and rebels by shacking up with Jody (Joan Cusack), a radiology technician who lives in their apartment building.

Beth begins a somewhat serious relationship with Charles (Arliss Howard), a local musician who is lonely and divorced. But she slowly sinks into depression and hits rock bottom by losing her job and literally staying in bed for days on end. Beth simply gives up: She can't cope with the loneliness, the sadness, the empty space next to her where her husband used to lie.

Like the crisp, clean cinematography that accompanies it, this is a smart, clear-eyed movie. Director Paul Brickman took seven years to follow up on the promise of his splashy debut, *Risky Business*, but it was well worth the wait. *Men Don't Leave* is funny, subtle and very well acted.

Lange is the nominal star, but her character is too depressed and inactive to dominate the story. It's the men who stick around that shine. Charlie Korsmo is strong and believable as the happily unprecocious Matt and Arliss

Howard is charming as Lange's laid-back new boyfriend, Charles.

But best of all are Chris O'Donnell and Joan Cusack. Brickman seems to have a knack for finding appealing young actors. First came Tom Cruise. Now there's O'Donnell, who gives a restrained, marvelous performance. He's tough and blustery to Charles, but when Mom seems to be slipping away, he reaches out to this stranger in a scene that is painfully honest and moving.

And then there's Cusack. She's been creating hilarious supporting characters for years and received an unusual amount of attention for her small bit in *Working Girl*. Her Jody is a loopy but practical person who is simply *odd*. No one ever worries about her; she is centered in an off-center sort of way. This

may be Cusack's funniest work yet, and every scene she's in belongs to her.

But the movie belongs to Brickman. It's a wise and witty piece that shows how guests at a wake pile food on a plate and shove it at Matt because they don't know what to say.

Men Don't Leave is also vaguely European in its ability to be both compassionate and detached. This is probably due more to Brickman's sensibilities than the French film it was "suggested" by, according to the credits. He has proved himself a top-notch director with the confidence to display a reserved and patient style. If his next movie is just as good, no one will complain if we don't see it until 1997.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

Center (372-5347) *Hard to Kill, Nightbreed, Stella, Sidewalk Stories* (11 a.m. Sat, Sun, 5:15 p.m. Mon)

Cinema N Drafthouse (376-6843) *Look Who's Talking* (starts Fri)
Hippodrome (375-4477) *Getting It Right* (Thurs), *LaBoheme* (Fri - Sun)

Oaks Four West (331-8118) *Born on the Fourth of July, Courage Mountain, Driving Miss Daisy, Glory,*

Oaks Six East (331-8818) *Flashback, Hard to Kill, The Little Mermaid, Madhouse, The Music Box, Roger and Me, Stella, Steel Magnolias* (midnight Fri, Sat), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (midnight Fri, Sat)

Plaza (378-2434) *Rockula* (opens Fri), *Enemies, A Love Story, Madhouse*

Reitz (392-1655) *Prizzi's Honor* (Thurs), *Batman* (Fri, Sat), *Easy Rider* (midnight Fri, Sat) *Ran* (Sun), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Mon), *Blade Runner* (Wed)

Royal Park (373-4277) *Men Don't Leave* (opens Fri), *Revenge, National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (\$1), *Parenthood* (\$1)