

## Movie Reviews

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Despite drawbacks, it's a joy 'Doing Time'

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By JAMES VERNIERE

*"Doing Time for Patsy Cline."* Not rated. At the Coolidge Corner Theatre. Three stars.

As hybrids go, you can't beat "Doing Time for Patsy Cline." A country music-fueled road movie about a naive youth from the Australian outback on his way to seek fame and fortune in Nashville, Tenn., the film is almost pathologically likable. Written and directed by Chris Kennedy, "Time for Patsy Cline" features Matt Day of "Muriel's Wedding" and "Love and Other Catastrophes" as its 18-year-old hero, Ralph Smith, the only son of a pair of eccentric outback pioneers.

Is it only fate that hitchhiking Ralph, who worships American country music legend Patsy Cline, is picked up by a femme fatale named Patsy (Miranda Otto) and her drug-running lover Boyd (Richard Roxburgh of "Oscar and Lucinda")? Before long, Ralph and Boyd are in a cell in a small, outback town, accused of drug dealing, while the mysterious Patsy has vanished.

Although the film's chronology is skewed, some time later Ralph runs into Patsy and Boyd again, this time in a neon-bright Nashville. Ralph, who is hopelessly in love with the green-eyed, red-haired Patsy, writes them a duet, "Dead Red Roses" (composed by Peter Brest of "Muriel's Wedding"). The song, which is so good it might become a country music hit in its own right, makes Ralph and Patsy country music's newest sensation.

None of this makes a heck of a lot of sense or holds up to close scrutiny. But Kennedy is so good at small, quirky touches and his film so well cast, including the not-so-threatening musical convicts who share cell space with Ralph and Boyd, you forgive it its lapses. Stylistically, "Doing Time for Patsy Cline" suggests a country music ballad. It's brightly hued and heavily freighted with icons and raw sentiment and drenched in country music's unique theatricality and imagery.

Otto, who does her own singing and will probably be unrecognizable to those who saw her performance in "Love Serenade," is the film's chief asset. Sexy, vulnerable, volatile and childlike, her Patsy reminds you eerily of the Marilyn Monroe of "The Misfits." Poised on the brink of stardom, Otto is a knockout in more ways than one.