



... for Patsy Cline

Albino Alligator

Wild America

Ulee's Gold

# Twists, turns and a touch of country

**Doing Time For Patsy Cline (MA); Albino Alligator (MA)**

"DON'T bring back no girl with thin hips — we can't afford such luxuries here," says overworked, weather-beaten Dad to his harassed son and heir, Ralph. No wonder Ralph is relinquishing his heritage in out-back Australia and heading for Nashville, where he hopes to become a country singing star.

Chris Kennedy's *Doing Time For Patsy Cline* is a thoroughly quirky movie with loads of charm and a fabulous soundtrack.

Ralph, portrayed as a sweet innocent by Matt Day, yearns to become a singer of renown. Like all innocents, Ralph is drawn to his opposite, who materialises as a worldly-wise conman called Boyd, played with just the right touch of cynicism by Richard Roxburgh. Leaving his parents' property, Ralph hitches a ride with Boyd and his girlfriend, Patsy, for whom Boyd has a variety of nicknames such as "potted rabbit", "peach" and "sweet pea". Boyd is an egotist who consumes those around him with his needs.

Patsy proudly tells Ralph she was named after the great Patsy Cline. Blinded by Patsy's beauty and whimsical manner, and angered by Boyd's meanness, Ralph — as if mesmerised by a snake — finds himself unable to leave.

Meanwhile, Patsy, whose sense of identity is unstable, is beginning to find herself attracted to Ralph.

When the trio is chased by the police and charged with drug dealing, Patsy manages to escape, but Ralph and Boyd find themselves sharing a cell in a country lock-up. Terrified of disappointing his parents and happy to take the rap for Patsy, Ralph refuses to divulge the truth. His dream of a better world is shattered, but then events take an unexpected turn.

The great strength of Kennedy's (*Glass, This Won't Hurt a Bit!*) third feature is the way he expertly weaves fact and fiction. Moving seamlessly between past, present and future, Kennedy creates a fictional world in which dream and reality become one.

*Doing Time For Patsy Cline* is a charming film full of unexpected moments and unusual events, and the three main actors are excellent.

★★★★  
 At the George  
 Review by **Barbara Creed**



Beauty and the beast: Patsy (Miranda Otto) and Boyd (Richard Roxburgh)

THE MOST unusual aspect of *Albino Alligator* is its title. It has a rather uncanny dimension that makes one think of ghosts and murky swamps. According to one of the characters in the film, an "albino alligator" is like a piece of bait — the other alligators force the albino to venture into hostile territory in order to flush out the enemy alligators, which they then attack with terrible ferocity.

Kevin Spacey's first film as director is a hostage drama that explores the extent to which men and women will go to save their skins. It will certainly not make cinema history. *Albino Alligator* has little new to offer, but it is extremely competent at every level. Set mostly in one room, it is very much a study of character and motivation.

Three small-time gangsters on the run from a botched robbery

unwittingly crash through a police stake-out, where a policeman is killed. They smash their getaway car and are forced to take refuge in a small bar in New Orleans with the somewhat prophetic name of *Dino's Last Chance*.

The three men are Dova (Matt Dillon), the leader who is not very bright; Milo (Gary Sinise), the most intelligent but who has been badly injured; and Law (William Fichtner), a psychopath whose callous disregard for all human value is chilling.

All the trio want is to tend to Milo's injuries and flee, but the bar is quickly surrounded by police and press.

In the bar, there are five people: the ageing, overweight publican (M. Emmet Walsh); the nervous bartender (Faye Dunaway); a cool stranger in a suit (Viggo Morten-

sen); a young guy playing pool (Skeet Ulrich); and a heavy drinker (John Spencer). Forced to take the customers and staff hostage, the three robbers — like the alligator pack — try to work out which of their captives will make the best bait.

The scenario is basically an excuse to create a volatile situation in which human emotions are pushed to the extreme. The three gangsters not only tear each other apart, but the hostages also circle around for the kill.

This is the film's most absorbing aspect: its detailed exploration of the fine line between acts of self-sacrifice and those of self-preservation.

*Albino Alligator* has the feel of a stage play on the theme of claustrophobia; the characters talk and argue a great deal in their confined

space until emotions boil over. But although Spacey keeps the emotional tension at a high level, the staginess of the setting becomes too restrictive, creating a slightly predictable momentum to actions and events.

The hostage drama is a classic cinematic form, but *Albino Alligator* is not in the same class as films such as *The Desperate Hours* and *Dog Day Afternoon*. It lacks the intense fear generated in the former and the explosive tension of the latter. But Spacey's direction is strong and the script by Christian Forte is witty and intelligent, with plenty of film references for the buffs. Performances are excellent, although Dunaway seems to be parodying herself.

★★★★  
 At the George, Nova  
 Review by **Barbara Creed**