

'Go for Sisters' Movie Review - Rolling Stone

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Go for Sisters



By **PETER TRAVERS**



Here's the thing about John Sayles. From his debut feature, 1980's *Return of the Secaucus Seven*, through the satire of *The Brother From Another Planet*, the labor troubles of *Matewan*, the baseball scandal of *Eight Men Out*, the political treachery of *City of Hope*, the painful intimacy of *Passion Fish*, the child's heart of *The Secret of Roan Inish*, the collision of past and present in *Lone Star*, and the scalding relevancy of *Men With Guns* – I could go on, as Sayles does consistently and always with feeling – this truly independent

writer and director never views his characters in isolation. They are always part of the world they live in, sometimes overwhelmed by it but more often driven to leave a mark.

Go for Sisters, the 18th Sayles movie, is deceptively simple in structure. Its focus is on two women who were so close in high school they could have (in case you're wondering about the title) passed for sisters. They haven't seen each other since. Bernice (LisaGay Hamilton) is now a California parole officer. And Fontayne (Yolonda Ross), an ex-con and former junkie, is now facing the brick-wall side of Bernice, who can send her back to a jail for a minor infraction. Instead, Bernice needs Yolanda's help. Rodney, Bernice's Iraq-vet son, has gone missing. One of her son's friends has been murdered, and Bernice needs to find him fast. With Yolanda's help, they connect with disgraced police detective Freddy Suarez (Edward James Olmos, effortlessly superb), who helps them navigate the path to Tijuana where Rodney may be smuggling Chinese immigrants into the United States.

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OK, I'm shutting up now. One of the pleasures of a Sayles movie is letting it sneak up on you. The unlikely trio of Bernice, Yolanda and Freddy comes into contact with enough characters to pack a novel. Sayles, whose novels range from *The Pride of the Bimbos* to *A Moment in the Sun*, likes this expansive approach. Audiences with stunted attention spans may balk at the way this technique can put the film's narrative drive in neutral. For me, the benefits far outweigh the flaws. It's the personal details, the interconnectedness of characters, that allow Sayles to create a world we can recognize as our own, no matter how dangerous or bizarre. If you want traditional suspense and a comforting ending, watch *CSI* or *NCIS*. It's humanity not flash that drives Sayles. With the help of Hamilton, Ross and

OF FOLK. IT'S MAINLY NOT RASH THAT DRIVES SAYLES. WITH THE HELP OF HAMILTON, ROSS AND Olmos, sublime actors who radiate grit and grace, Sayles has made *Go for Sisters* a movie that stays inside your head long after you see it. It's a keeper.

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