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The part that follows 'happily ever after' on display in 'The Lovers'

Azazel Jacobs' latest work begins where most romantic comedies end

The Lovers," written and directed by Azazel Jacobs, is a humorous examination of long-term married life — if your idea of married life is that both members of the couple are having adulterous affairs with demanding younger partners.

Happily ever after is a distant memory to spouses Michael (Tracy Letts) and Mary (Debra Winger), who, unbeknownst to the other, each plan to call it quits once their son is back at college.

They announce — promise — the matrimonial drop-dead date to their respective lovers. It's not difficult for them to let go, as they've long been strangers by now. But a stranger sees things a habituated person does not and, with Michael and Mary, a spark reignites that grows into an ember, then a flame that reanimates their lifeless marriage.

I interviewed Jacobs about "The Lovers" during his recent visit to Chicago, and we discussed his filmmaking philosophy and what it was like to work with Winger and Letts. Here are edited excerpts from that discussion.

Ford: The movie feels very

theatrical, like a classic bedroom farce. Will you talk about what your inspirations were for the movie?

Jacobs: I feel like this is very much a story about people performing, so that theatrical element was something I was really hoping for. ... In a lot of ways, that has been something that I see in the films I am most attracted to as well.

Even in the early films, the screwball comedies, you do get the sense of the set on stage. You get the sense of the performance, and I wanted that element in there.

"... this is far from making infidelity appealing. But it is something that anyone who is alive, I think, has had to deal with ..."

Ford: How did you choose the age cohort of the characters for the movie?

Jacobs: My way in was through the son — this is not my story, and it's not my parents' story. ... But I did understand the son going through the stage when you just feel like, "Wow, I just can't



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BONUS FEATURE

For a video excerpt of Rebecca Ford's interview with director Azazel Jacobs on "The Lovers," visit chicagolawbulletin.com or Ford's YouTube channel at youtube.com/r1f773.

believe this is the way the world functions." ... So, the son was my way in.

I thought that the idea that the son was coming back from college already planked the age of the parents and then I am somebody interested in telling stories about people you don't generally see

was your experience?

Jacobs: It wasn't my experience. In fact, it's interesting that they are totally, totally veterans but not in this situation. I think this is a much smaller film than Debra's done, and a very different film than she's done, and this is a very different role than Tracy has ever played in a movie. I'm somebody that's been making movies for over 20 years, but I'm still hungry, and I am looking for someone who is still hungry, and I found that with them.

I think that together with my crew and the other actors that we were able to, kind of, hopefully, create a situation [in which] they can make it their own. So that's what I saw on stage — on set — was just this incredible, incredible talent ... getting to express themselves in a way that got them excited.

Ford: How did you choose infidelity as a topic?

Jacobs: I had this idea of this movie beginning where a lot of romantic comedies end. I like the idea that this film starts when a lot of those ... fade out, and it's happily ever after. What happens after the happily ever after — whether it is 20 years later, or the next day, or a few hours later?

So I'd say that this is far from making infidelity appealing. But it is something that anyone who is alive, I think, has had to deal with and in some ways I thought this was a more truthful representation — just showing what happens when that becomes more work and more of a drag than the thing you are trying to avoid or escape.

Ford: Do you have a philosophy of the kind of work you want to accomplish, your body of work?

Jacobs: My philosophy is to do my best to do work that I care for and that I can stand up for, and stand behind.