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Review/Film

Michelle Pfeiffer in a Tale Of Interracial Friendship

By JANET MASLIN

"Love Field," a gentle, involving film about interracial friendship, begins with a very broad stroke in the form of Lurene Hallett (Michelle Pfeiffer), a blond bombshell who feels a special psychic bond with Jacqueline Kennedy. The year is 1963, the President has just been assassinated, and Lurene feels duty bound to take the bus from Dallas to Washington to attend the funeral. "What I want is to go to that rotunda and file past that caisson or cortège or whatever it is and pay my respects," Lurene says, savoring the important-sounding words that make her think she has a mission.

For Lurene, feeling closely involved in this national tragedy amounts to a kind of character trait.

A woman boards a bus in Texas to attend J.F.K.'s funeral.

Defining herself visibly in terms of Mrs. Kennedy's appeal, she boards the bus wearing a homemade lavender suit in the Kennedy style and sporting a bouffant hairdo that happens to be platinum blond. "Love Field," which opens today in New York and Los Angeles and will be seen in the rest of the country in February, takes its title from the Dallas airport where Lurene turns up, early in the story, to catch a glimpse of the Presidential plane.

A character this flamboyant would risk sinking any film. But Ms. Pfeiffer, again demonstrating that she is as subtle and surprising as she is beautiful, plays Lurene with remarkable grace. Her only problem, if

Metropolitan Opera

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Michelle Pfeiffer

Love Field

Directed by Jonathan Kapian; written by Don Roos; director of photography, Ralf Bode; edited by Jane Kurson; music by Jerry Goldsmith; production designer, Mark Freeborn; produced by Sarah Pillsbury and Midge Sanford; released by Orion Pictures. Running time: 104 minutes. This film is rated PG-13.

Lurene Hallett	Michelle Pfeiffer
Paul Cater	Dennis Haysbert
Jonell	Stephanie McFadden
Ray Hallett	Brian Kerwin
Mrs. Enright	Louise Latham

you could call it that, is looking like a cross between the young Mrs. Kennedy and the Marilyn Monroe of "The Misfits." It isn't easy to believe that a pastel vision like Ms. Pfeiffer's Lurene could pass through so many sleepy Southern towns without causing more of a stir.

Lurene does get a rise out of Paul Cater (Dennis Haysbert), a fellow passenger on the bus, but she commands his attention for the wrong reasons. A quiet, serious black man traveling with a little girl (Stephanie McFadden), whom he introduces as Jonell, his daughter, Paul has little patience for the chattering Lurene, who insists on befriending him.

Lurene's sweetness is real, but her self-image includes a bit too much of Lady Bountiful. When she insists on telling Paul that President Kennedy "did a lot for the Negro," Paul particularly bristles. "Hey, you want this?" he asks dryly, offering Lurene a magazine. "I'm finished with it. It's got lots of pictures."

As the film progresses, Lurene persists in finding ways of attaching herself to Paul and Jonell. Jonathan Kaplan ("The Accused"), a director capable of uncommonly delicate treatment of difficult issues, carefully conveys the context in which this friendship is formed.

This modest film actually covers a lot of ground, touching on the racial and sexual attitudes of its time while also filling in the particulars of its characters' earlier lives. Lurene's unhappy marriage clearly has a lot to do with her eagerness to reinvent herself in such dramatic ways. Paul's constant watchfulness around white Southerners and his occasional angry outbursts at Lurene's unwitting gaucheness on the subject of race are also carefully drawn.

So are the limits placed on friendship between a black man and a white woman in rural Southern society. When Paul comforts Lurene by touching her arm, a white woman looks on disapprovingly. When Lurene is ostentatiously nice to Paul at a bus station, a black woman registers similar dismay. And when these two finally give in to temptation, there is a long pause before anything happens. The camera watches both Paul and Lurene think things over before they kiss.

As written by Don Roos (who also wrote "Single White Female"), "Love Field" brings remarkably few preconceptions to the telling of its understated story. The characters transcend stereotypes, but what really matters is the actors' ability to

breathe these people to life. Mr. Haysbert is warm, sturdy and impressive in conveying Paul's mixture of exasperation and attraction to Lurene. Ms. Pfeiffer has a much showier role. Once again, she manages to be quietly spectacular, revealing the ways Lurene's inner desperation contributes to her outward gaiety. "I just kind of ran it together: don't know why!" she exclaims nervously, trying to explain how she got that name out of her original Louise Irene.

"Love Field" is finally a shade too polite. It moves cautiously in developing its central relationship, perhaps as a reflection of the restrictive world in which the characters live. But that world is outstandingly well evoked through the series of quiet, desolate, Southern settings through which Paul and Lurene pass.

At a remote farmhouse, an elderly white woman (Louise Latham) harbors these two once they become fugitives, and displays a grudging awareness that the world is changing. And in another small town, when Lurene tries to tell a black mechanic of President Kennedy's good deeds regarding racial equality, the man says: "Take a look around, ma'am. Look like he done much here?"

"Love Field" is rated PG-13 (Parents strongly cautioned). It includes brief violence, mild sexual suggestiveness and slight profanity.

present the first performance this season of Wagner's "Walküre" tomorrow evening. The cast includes Gwyneth Jones as Brünhilde, Jessye Norman as Sieglinde, Hanna Schwarz as Fricka, Gary Lakes as Siegmund, James Morris as Wotan and Aage Haugland as Hunding. James Levine conducts. Information: (212) 362-6000.