

## **Maudie**

Some art cognoscenti may have heard of the Grandma Moses of Canadian art, Maud Dowley Lewis, a primitive painter who flourished in Nova Scotia after the 1950's and died in 1970. She is now the subject of a touching biopic "Maudie."

Maudie is an orphan and a spinster, "born funny" she says, showing a crumpled posture as a victim of juvenile arthritis. At the film's outset, she is kicked out of the only home she has ever known when a sour aunt Ida (Gabrielle Rose) and a thoughtless brother Charles (Zachary Bennett) sell out that home from under her. Maudie, homeless though always maintaining a spry demeanor, becomes a housekeeper for a taciturn handyman Everett Lewis (Ethan Hawke), a sour loner who lives in a tiny rural shack (filmed in Newfoundland and Labrador rather than Nova Scotia). She and Everett early on learn that she is no housekeeper, but she discovers painting in her ample spare time and begins decorating the shack with colorful images of the nature around her. Lewis has only one bed in his ramshackle space, so the two are forced to share it.

With time, the two marry, more for convenience than anything else, and Maudie's work comes to the attention of a transient local, Sandra (Kari Matchett), who is charmed by the work and is the first to commission one of her paintings on board. She eventually gains modest fame, selling her small, bright works outside the shack, and even providing work to the Nixon White House in the late 1960's.

Ethan Hawke adds some versatility to his resumé with his first ever thoroughgoing curmudgeon, one who doesn't so much "warm up" to Maudie as to grumpily accept her presence. For Maudie, that is enough. The principal reason to see "Maudie" is the fine British actress Sally Hawkins. She is moving, even haunting, rendering a portrait that starts out exhibiting a pitiable soul but which grows in dimension and depth throughout, including a most painful maternal reveal late in the picture. Like her painstaking painting itself, the film, carefully directed by Irish woman Aisling Walsh, moves deliberately, as Maudie doggedly sets to make her world brighter, an aim she fully achieved.

*(The film runs a refreshing 83 minutes and is rated "PG-13.")*

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