

CrissCross

(aka: "Alone Together")

US : 1992 : dir. Chris Menges : M-G-M

: 100 min

prod: Anthea Sylbert : scr: Scott Sommer : dir.ph.: Ivan Strasburg

[David Arnott](#) [deb]; [Christy Martin](#); [Damian Vantriglia](#)

Goldie Hawn; Arliss Howard; James Gammon; Keith Carradine; J.C. Quinn; Steve Buscemi;
Paul Calderon; Nada Despotovich; Derek Velez

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ∅ M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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*The film itself may be much ado about nothing of interest, but David Arnott is one of it's compensations, certainly.
Source: indeterminate website*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Good intentions abound in this low-key drama set in Key West, Florida in 1969. A 12-year old boy lives with his mom, trying to survive since

his dad (a messed-up Vietnam vet) deserted them three years ago. The boy's rootlessness and (eventual) moral dilemma are delineated in credible but much too leisurely fashion, making this potential sleeper a yawner instead. ** "



Mommie's boy – Goldie Hawn gets broody. It's quite understandable that the "Laugh-in" bimbo of yore should be trying to extend her range, and get her fans to accept her in more contemplative, maternal roles. She rather shoots herself in the foot by then playing a character who sells her body to make an honest buck.

Source for still left: CVMC website; still right: indeterminate website

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

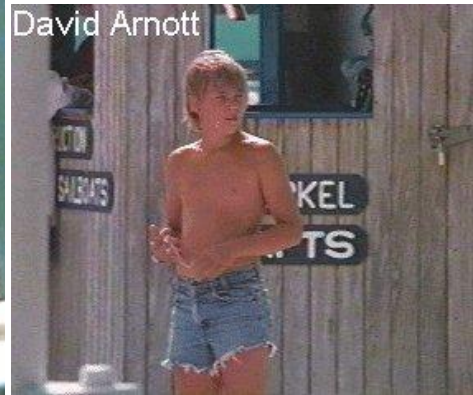
"For all those who can't believe there's a Goldie Hawn film that wasn't worth releasing, here's the proof. Goldie makes another stab at serious drama here following the rather more successful "DECEIVED". But this shallow story of a woman's struggle in the sixties to make a better life for herself and her 12-year son is slow and over-saturated with melodrama. The plot sees Hawn taking a job as a stripper to make ends meet after her soldier husband (Keith Carradine), a mixed-up Vietnam vet, has left her for life in a monastery. Even Goldie's fiercest fans will have to fight to enjoy this one or, for that matter, to even stay awake. * "

CVMC video retail/rental website review:

"Twelve year old Christopher Cross (David Arnett) is frustrated by the lack of a father and angered by his mother's career as a stripper. Believing money is the answer to his problems, the boy gets involved in selling cocaine, but soon finds himself surrounded by scoundrels and cops. The drug-dealing element is really just a subplot to a larger slice-of-life look at growing up in the late 60's, our young hero 's world also including chums, school and a girlfriend. At the least, an unusual role for Goldie Hawn, who here plays the boy's mom. Directed by Chris Menges.

Rated R: adult themes [sic]; brief nudity; sexual themes; profanity; mild violence

Categories: Boy Films, Little to Preteen, Adolescent, Coming-of-Age, Drama, First Love, Girl Films, Adolescent. "



Perhaps this would be an opportune moment to point out that Goldie Hawn is not in fact the central character of the film. Her son is. The critics had difficulty coping with this profoundly disturbing concept. I did not.

*Source for stills:
various websites*

Radio Times review:

"Former cinematographer Chris Menges came horribly unstuck with this, his second stab at directing. While he admirably captures the sights and sounds of Key West in the late sixties, he fails to inject any life into an all-too-predictable tale of a waitress who turns to stripping to support her son. Goldie Hawn is hopelessly miscast as the downtrodden mother, while the subplot about her son's involvement with drug smugglers is ludicrously contrived. Contains violence, swearing and nudity. ** "

"Tracy Cross is forced to become a dancer at a seedy hotel¹ when her husband deserts her and their son on his return from Vietnam². ** "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

¹ no she isn't

² no he doesn't



*Great bottom – but Chris is **not** following in his mother's footsteps (perish the thought). He is on the verge of losing his (forward) virginity to a girl of 13 – appropriately named Termina – when her folks arrive back and prevent consensual “under-age” sex from rearing its controversial head. This, by the way, is the **only** nudity in the film, but the **Radio Times** still felt obliged to warn its readers about it. We don't want our kids glimpsing this, do we !*



Not to be confused with a 1949 Burt Lancaster film of the same name (with a space in the middle) or the British children's TV boarding school serial.

Films of this ilk are generally slotted under the heading “slice of life” – which is to say that nothing very much happens, the characters themselves are not out of the ordinary, and the story has nothing particularly important to tell us. Continental cinema, with its very different narrative pacing, frequently falls into this category. But if we are to spend 100 minutes in the company of ordinary people leading unremarkable lives, then the film-maker must offer us real compensations in the form of close observations of these people, their environment, relationships and habits, or else the dialogue must have twists and turns that hold our interest. Without these qualities, a slice of life can be very thin and plain bread.

Scott Sommer's screenplay for "**CRISSCROSS**", adapted from his own novella, exhibits none of these virtues. The story is set in the summer of 1969, the summer of Apollo XI, which is meant to resonate through the audience as a defining cultural moment (which it certainly was), yet watching his film closely I see little period observation, beyond the most obvious devices of some sixties cars and a few period hits (like Fleetwood Mac's "*Albatross*") on the soundtrack. I was not in Florida in 1969, and my only knowledge of the culture of that time was mediated through American sitcoms, pop music and current affairs. Even so, this film neither looks nor sounds authentically sixties to me. It is strangely devoid of pop culture referents (TV shows, movie hoardings, kid slang etc). The central character's dad had rotated back from Vietnam three years previously, in 1966 thus, but although the Vietnam War is still in full flood, nobody even mentions it, nor anti-war protests, nor civil rights marches. This is simply poor writing, and lazy directing. You can't just pop a few shots from the Apollo mission on a period TV set and, whoops-a-daisy, we're back in 69!

Sommer resorts to the over-used device of the sappy first-person voice-over – that curse of the "coming of age" movie – but David Arnott delivers it in a flat tone, and it's entirely without wit. It's a boy's voice speaking, but we clearly hear the adult writer behind it. "If there's one thing I've learned, it's a total nightmare to love someone, and have them run out on you." Does *anyone* believe a twelve-year old boy would construe a sentiment like that?

Chris is living with mom in a Key West beachside hotel, where he cleans the pool when he's not working a hot dog stand, or doing a paper round, or collecting regular deliveries of fish for the hotel manager from an offshore boat. Midway through the film his dog snatches one of the fish, and he discovers that he's really been handling cocaine deliveries all along, hidden inside the fish. So far from this being, as one critic observed, a ludicrously contrived subplot, it's the main pivot of the story. Reviewers in general were so mesmerised by Goldie Hawn's timeless backside they neglected to notice her character is subordinate to her son's. This *isn't* the story of an abandoned mother's struggle to make ends meet. This is the story of a son discovering, to his great indignation and shame, exactly what his mother *does* to make ends meet. No sooner has he learned what this white powder ("that turns people into sex maniacs") will fetch on the open market, than he thinks he's found a way to make his mom quit table dancing. "People are hard to figure, Chris" a grizzled friend at the hotel advises, "Moms especially."

In despair, the boy pays a visit to his dad, whom he hasn't seen in three years but to whom he remains stubbornly devoted, at his Miami monastery. Dad is uncomfortable at seeing him again, cannot offer any advice on how to wean mom off the stripping habit, and is doubly uncomfortable when she later shows up to collect Chris. It's an odd cameo from Keith Carradine, and if the chemistry between him and Hawn is nil, at least it's supposed to be, but they seem incongruous even for an **ex**-couple.

Mom meanwhile has met another guy, Joe, while waitressing at the hotel during the day. Joe favours us with such witticisms as "God gave us baseball to make up for the industrial revolution", which is about as deep as a hotel swimming pool. Chris reacts severely to this newcomer, and doesn't much care for mom making ends meet in *that* sense either, though his grasp on the facts of life is, let's say, tenuous (did twelve-year olds *really* not know about orgasms in 1969? This one doesn't.) He's on the cusp of advancing his knowledge when he visits his girlfriend "Termina" (Christy Martin), improbably the elder sister of his best friend "Buggs" (Damian Vantriglia). Termina, 13, invites him straight to her bedroom and proceeds to undress him, but her folks return *just in the nick of time* to spare the blushes of parents in the audience. There'll be no orgasms for **you**, sonny!

So the plot saunters along, and Chris makes an approach to a couple of low-lives on the beach to sell the cocaine he found in the fish. "Want to score some one-on-one action?" he tries for openers (no orgasms for you *that* way either, sonny!) and when that pitch doesn't work, offers them some "sex-maniac powder". His first sale goes like a breeze – sort of – and

he's convinced now that he can rescue his mom by some discreet lone trading.

The lowlifes track him down and pressure to do a much bigger deal, but first he must liberate some more powder from another fish shipment. Chris tries for his mother's sake to mend bridges with her new boyfriend Joe, and takes him along when he makes his next fish drop, but – oh no! – is mugged by two desperate Puerto Rican schoolboys for his catch of fish the moment he steps off the boat. Joe can barely refrain from laughing, and when Chris reports the calamity to the hotel manager, the man cuts up rough with him, forcing Joe to come to the boy's defence. Chris hightails it and runs straight into the two guys waiting to do the drug deal, but the hotel manager catches him in mid-sale. Joe now produces his warrant card and busts everybody on the scene. Gee whiz, Joe's a narc!

There's some hasty tying up of loose ends – Chris gets a year's probation, mom and Joe go their separate ways, Chris and Mom move to a trailer park – before the sententious voiceover tries to draw a parallel between the Apollo XI astronauts returning to Earth and Chris coming to terms with the realities of his life. Hey, and I didn't even mention Steve Buscemi! He has a bit part as a kitchen hand at the hotel, even more bizarrely than Carradine. Buscemi is such a natural with punchy, pithy dialogue, it's a waste to see him with barely five lines in the film.

From the archive's perspective at any rate, the film does have small merits. The boy is the focus of the narrative throughout. He has a girlfriend (of course), but she doesn't occupy his every waking thought. He squabbles constantly with Goldie Hawn, but without any overdone histrionic episodes. There's a nice throwaway scene where Buggs demonstrates to Chris how to make a live lizard dangle from the tip of your tongue, an authentic boyhood touch. The summery pursuits – cycling, swimming, boating – are all there (did kids do "wheelies" in the 1960s? Chris does), but we see nothing of his school life beyond an interview with a "counsellor" (did they have *those* in 1969?). David Arnott breezes through the whole film in sawn-off Levi shorts (Coppertone even gets a name-check on the film's end credits), and the eye does not tire of him, but his performance, to be fair, is only so-so. Looking good in tight shorts is not talent enough to carry a full-length feature. He swallows some of his dialogue, and lacks the emotional range to involve the audience fully with his family crisis, as he sees it.

In one sense the film does catch a breath of sixties childhood, but I suspect director Menges was not fully aware of it. Chris spends his whole time freewheeling on his own, out of doors, unsupervised. He strikes up conversations with adults, at the hotel, on the beach, without any qualms on either side. He hitches lifts from strangers late at night without coming to harm, or expecting to, and his mother doesn't quiz him urgently on his every daily movement. How easily we let that slip by us on the screen, and how very different it all is from the world they've constructed for children today. The sixties *were* relaxed in that sense, and so were the seventies, before the poison of the "child abuse" lobby took hold. It's a small truth of observation, but worth acknowledging all the same. Children did enjoy a semblance of freedom once.

Finally, there are just too many comparable and better films (from outside the US) in which a boy or girl of Chris' age must nurse a lone parent off alcoholism, drug dependency, prostitution, and in which the kid grasps that responsibility with stronger, surer hands than Chris does here. His dilemma may be real enough, but the script makes small beer of it. Hawn, for her part, deserves a compliment for not trying to steal the film away from Arnott.

For another title lamely hitched onto the seminal moment of Apollo XI, and with no more to say for itself than this one, see "**PONTIAC MOON**", and for more ersatz-1960s boyhood with the ubiquitous voice-over, see TV's nostalgia sitcom "**The Wonder Years**", which starred the personable Fred Savage, undergoing the longest puberty in human history. In 1994 director Menges made a rather better fist of "**SECOND BEST**".

See subject index under [ALCOHOLISM / DRUGS](#), [BOY MEETS GIRL](#), [MATCHMAKERS / MATCHBREAKERS](#), [WORKING BOYS / WORKING GIRLS](#) and [DIRECTORS](#).