

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

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'Showgirls' not a show piece

By CLAUDIA PUIG
Los Angeles Times

HOLLYWOOD — The critical and commercial debacle that is Showgirls all seems to be crashing down on star Elizabeth Berkley's dancing lap.

Hoping to break from her TV sitcom past, the 22-year-old actress took a starring role in the NC-17 film, performing numerous scenes totally nude.

She was greeted by some of the most hostile reviews in recent memory, was dropped by her agent and so far hasn't lined up her next acting role.

For Berkley's efforts, the role of Normi Malone — a headline part in a \$40 million film — paid her only \$100,000, Paul Verhoeven, the film's director, confirmed.

"We had to do this; we had no more money," said Verhoeven, who was paid \$2 million to direct, which he said was half his usual fee.

The criticism "all smells kind of foul to me," said a source close to the actress. "She's been getting the blame for this movie and it's so unfair. She is an innocent, a nail. Paul Verhoeven directed her and said, 'Be this way.'"

Berkley was in Australia and could not be reached for comment.

For his part, Verhoeven accepts the blame, acknowledging he may have simply made a bad movie.

"I never thought this continuous bashing of the movie and of Elizabeth would happen," Verhoeven said. "We're sitting with these ruins in front of us. I realized with the nudity and the fact that critics are essentially Puritan that there would be backlash and anger, but I never thought the movie wouldn't do well. So I never accounted that she would be put in such a bad position and I feel terrible about it ..."

"If somebody is to blame it's (screenwriter) Joe (Eszterhas) or me. I think she did exactly what we wanted and what we thought would be good. And apparently we failed."

Verhoeven said audiences and critics confused the strident, unappealing character Berkley played with the actress herself.

"Her performance that everybody is so against is based on a character," Verhoeven said. "The hate towards her character — an edgy, nearly psychotic character — is actually a compliment to her performance."

Berkley was dropped last week by Mike Menchel, her agent at Creative Artists Agency, who said only that the agency and

Berkley "didn't see eye to eye on the style and type of representation."

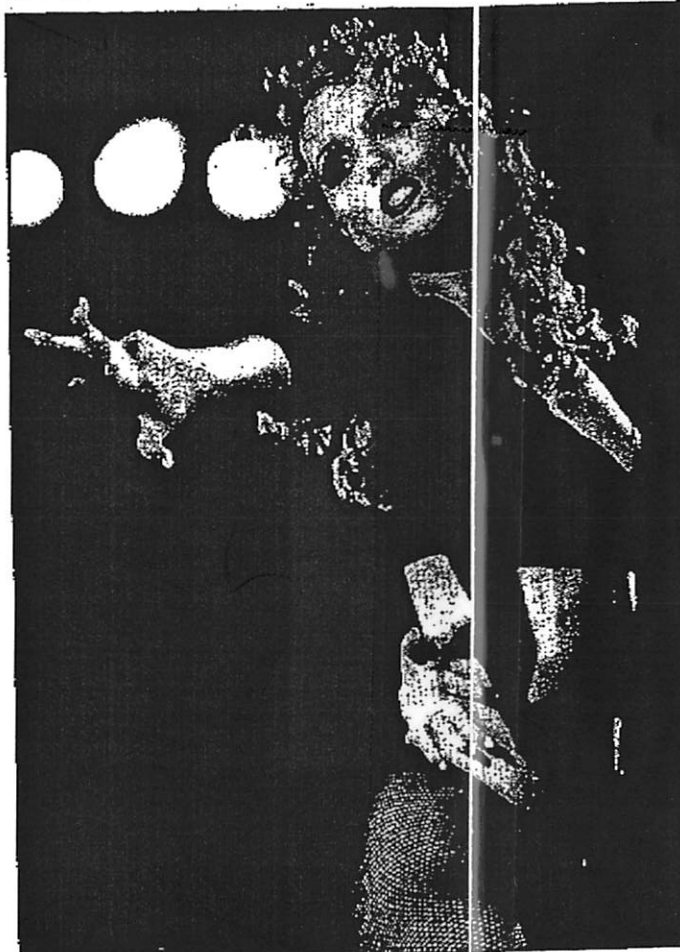
She then appealed to some of the agents who had aggressively courted her while she was making Showgirls only to find that, after the bad reviews, they refused to take her calls, according to an industry source.

She has since landed with United Talent Agency, and the same team of agents that handles Sandra Bullock, led by Cynthia Shelton-Droke, Steve Small and Nick Stevens.

Industry insiders fault Berkley for being difficult, demanding star billing and "wanting to get to the top too fast." But, asked the source close to the actress, "who doesn't want to be a star too fast?"

"It would be unfair to write Elizabeth off in terms of this picture," Eszterhas said. "I think people should be a little more compassionate. ... I think she did better than people are willing to give her credit for." But both he and Verhoeven say all the exposure may ultimately help Berkley's career. Eszterhas even sees her being right for one of his own projects.

"I have a script at Savoy called *Foreplay* that I think Elizabeth would be perfect for," he said.



Elizabeth Berkley finds role a mistake



RON: I thought I'd send this along for your spiritual edification. Elizabeth Berkley was the star of NBC's "Saved by the Bell" - a kids Sat. morning T.V. show produced by Peter Engles - one of the few BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN PRODUCERS in Burbank, CA. "SAVED BY THE BELL" WAS A #1 hit for several years and was Engles' "Flagship" Family Values show. Why Berkley chose to go so far in an evil direction is anyone's guess but it seems she's reaping what she sows.