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ART AND INTEGRITY IN 'THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS'

Abstract:

The title of the film by Steve Kloves (1989) refers to the dual-piano, languishing lounge act performed by two brothers. The resurgence and demise of the musical team is brought about by the addition of a sultry, female vocalist--Susie Diamond. Embedded within the story is an exploration of integrity and its augmentation by the virtues of courage and honesty. Integrity marks an individual whose self is a coherent, consistent whole. Important elements of the individual's personality are mutually supportive rather than being disparate or in conflict. The integrity scrutinized by the film is Jack's; it involves the younger brother's inconsistent fidelity to his considerable musical talent. Late in the story we learn that he despises performing the popular musical fare with his brother and that he really wants to be creative, playing jazz. Although Jack is shown playing piano with modulated passion at a jazz club, we infer that he does so infrequently. Jack's older brother is not in conflict with himself because his talent is suited to playing the bland tunes that are the staple of the act. Jack's integrity is compromised because his commitment to his art is half-hearted; he cannot make the leap of faith--in himself. He knows that he hates playing the lounge music, is moved by jazz, and has considerable ability. Jack therefore realizes, however vaguely, that he ought to give himself to the music he loves, despite the risks this would entail. The trajectory of the film-story can be viewed as Jack finally summoning the courage to honestly confront his struggle with integrity and deciding to do something about it.

Keywords:

integrity; virtue; courage; music; honesty; art; popular