

NEW YORK POST

PRAIRIE HOME – ADD COMPANION

By LOU LUMENICK



October 20, 2006 -- THIS year's actress to watch is Elizabeth Reaser, who delivers a tour de force as a determined German mail-order bride who comes to 1920 Minnesota in Ali Selim's captivating indie "Sweet Land."

Reaser's free-spirited Inge not only has to win over Olaf (Tim Guinee), who doesn't speak her lan-

guage - nor she, his - but also an insular Norwegian-American farming community where sentiment still runs high against Germans just after the World War I armistice.

The superb cast includes John Heard as a minister who disapproves of both Inge and Olaf's living arrangements and Inge's coffee; Alan Cumming as Olaf's childlike

friend Frandsen, who has many children of his own; and Ned Beatty as Frandsen's third cousin, a banker who forecloses on Frandsen's farm.

"Sweet Land" is gorgeously shot and directed without a false note, but its chief virtue is the beautiful and little-known Reaser. Her mastery of craft and versatility in this and the forthcoming "Puccini for Beginners" (in which she plays a contemporary lesbian) puts overhyped A-listers like Scarlett Johansson to shame.

SWEET LAND

Running time: 110 minutes. Rated PG (brief partial nudity, mild swearing).