# Movie Review: 'Margot at the Wedding'

*by David_Elliott*

Written and directed by a man, Noah Baumbach, "Margot at the Wedding" might rank as the "chick flick" of the year if it had more good scenes for Nicole Kidman and Jennifer Jason Leigh.

'MARGOT AT THE WEDDING' - Laughing it up despite a lot of hard times, rivalrous sisters Margot (Nicole Kidman, left) and Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh) power 'Margot at the Wedding.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ken Regan. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Kidman is Margot, the tall sister with a mildly lofty reputation as a New York fiction writer. We get a full draft of her source material in the film, much of it from Leigh as sister Pauline, a been-around teacher sliding into foolish nuptials with a self-pitying artist, Malcolm (Jack Black).

Black restrains nearly all his comic impulses, even when standing mostly nude in front of a mirror. Malcolm is the kind of guy who strikes taunting poses and then, challenged, tends to blubber, whine and ask for pity.

He's like a blob of cheese caught between the serrated knives that are Pauline and Margot, who reunite for the wedding and to settle old scores.

Baumbach lets the camera slop around, inside people's heads as well as the old family house. A gaunt old tree seems to symbolize past stability. No secrets are safe, and no embarrassing feelings are left unexpressed.

Everyone is unstable, resentful, touchy, except (briefly) John Turturro as the sanely decent husband left by Margot, who drags along her devoted, worried, slightly androgynous son (Zane Pais, never playing for cutes). With all the messy combustion and sniping, including Ciaran Hinds as a pompous sex cruiser, the movie only cooks when Kidman and Leigh are together, hashing their sisterly souls in a mode of Chekhov come to Peyton Place.

It's a movie in which everyone wants answers without being able to formulate the questions. The cast is so good that the story doesn't quite dissolve into soapy wall stains, but we can see some bubbles.

Baumbach got much praise (a bit too much) for "The Squid and the Whale," another family story jammed with ragged ambivalence, anchored by Jeff Daniels' great performance. This effort has less focus, and while Kidman and Leigh nibble close to top work, with even their differing sizes working dramatically, their nuzzling, nagging teamwork finally fades into the general buzz of dysfunction.

A Paramount Classics release. Director, writer: Noah Baumbach. Cast: Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jack Black, Zane Pais, Ciaran Hinds, John Turturro. Running time: 1 hour, 31 minutes. Rated R. 2 stars.

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