The Screen Savor: â€˜Beau for Beauâ€™

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "THE HOLIDAY"

Yes, it's a chick flick and yes, it's a holiday chick flick. But this sweetly smart film is much more like a celebratory glass of expensive champagne than a chalky mug of your neighbor's homemade eggnog. Bottom's up.

The very worst thing about this movie is the title. Truncated to just the word "Holiday," 14 other movies of the same name popped up. Just like Kate Winslet's character Iris, the movie's label deserves far better treatment.

Though the plot is classic romantic comedy. Two women with man trouble, one residing in a sumptuous Beverly Hills manse, while the other ensconced in a cozy English cabin, decide to switch residences for two weeks to get away from it all. A smooth-talking English cad (Rufus Sewell) has kidnapped Iris' huge heart, while Cameron Diaz' Amanda isn't sure she still has one. Enter Iris' overly-sensitive, gorgeous brother Graham (Jude Law) to shake up Amanda's world, while on the other side of the pond, film composer Miles (Jack Black) slowly warms up Iris'. Add one peppery screenwriter steeped in the reminiscence of his heyday of Hollywood (Arthur, as played by Eli Wallach) and voila! what a grand present just in time for the season.

Strong performances by British stars Winslet and Law are top-rate. When Winslet's heart breaks at watching her cad with another woman, her pain is so real that only the hardest of hearts in the audience could remain untouched. Ditto for Law, who's never seemed so vulnerable. Brilliant actors, they literally have us laughing through their tears.

But the Americans, Miles and Amanda (Diaz and Black) don't fare as well. With Diaz deprived of her "Charlie's Angels" stunts, and Black robbed of his over-the-top comic antics, they give less authoritative performances than their romantic counterparts. Diaz never seems more at home than when she punches her ex-lover in the face. As for Black, well, I wished that Eli Wallach were closer to Winslet in age, since they had the chemistry that the Winslet/Black pairing lacked. It's not that a cute, chubby man can't have sex appeal, but Black has yet to find his true romantic charm. His slick schtick may work fine in outrageous comedies but as a leading man, no pun intended, he comes up short.

Eli Wallach and his band of cronies mid-revelry at a Hannukah party is a joy, and Sewell's cad is perfectly written. Women audience members were actually screaming at the screen, wishing him anything but a Merry Christmas.

Nancy Meyers' has written another witty script to rival her last endeavor, "Something's Gotta Give." The subplot concerning the love affair between Arthur and old Hollywood, nudged along by the blossoming Iris, is a highlight. And bowing to the fact that Amanda creates movie trailers, the running gag of the trailer voiceover in her head, summarizing her ongoing dilemmas, is great fun.

But there are plot questions. E.g., if Iris is a journalist by trade, how can she suddenly act as a highly capable physical therapist for Arthur? And In Hollywood, how often might industry heavyweights drop everything to come to a party with less than a week's notice? And during the holidays? Impossible!

In Meyers' movies, like frothy Nick and Nora Charles films from the 30's, no one ever has money troubles. The irony is obviousâ€”tough economic times, both then and now, make the wealthy denizens up on screen that much more appealing â€¦ and yet annoying at the same time.

As director, Meyers is capable, but not great. She could have been more judicious in the cutting room; having Amanda and Graham fall for each other in a silent montage is a cheat; and the comedic over-the-top crying that she gives to Winslet is a direct steal from Diane Keaton's extremely funny wailings in "Something's Gotta Give."

But these are minor quibbles. The film is ultimately 138 minutes of holiday time that is far more joyously spent in the theater than battling through the malls on any day this December.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: B-plus

Kimberly Gadette can be reached at gadettek@yahoo.com. Production Credits: "The Holiday" Directed by: Nancy Meyers Written by: Nancy Meyers Cast: Cameron Diaz, Kate Winslet, Jude Law, Jack Black, Eli Wallach, Rufus Sewell Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 138 minutes Grade: B-plus

The Screen Savor: â€˜Beau for Beauâ€™ by Kimberly_Gadette