

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "DREAMGIRLS"

There's a whole lot of dreamy to this "Dreamgirls": Jennifer Hudson and That Voice, so powerful it deserves its own billing. Eddie Murphy's amazing Jimmy Early. (He sings! He dances!) The costumes (if you don't like one, no problem, just wait three minutes), the sets, the music, the staging. At times, it has all the flash, fun and spectacle we've been expecting. But like a dream, only a few vibrant moments linger, while the rest fades away upon waking.

It's the usual tale of young-kids-make-good, climb the dizzying heights of fame, then wonder what it's all about. But "Dreamgirls" also touches on weightier issues that seem all the more dramatic when accompanied by some of the smarter musical numbers. "Steppin' to the Bad Side" explores payola and plugola, the widely-accepted bribery methods that were entrenched in the music industry at the time. "Cadillac Car" vividly depicts the white mainstream's appropriation and ensuing weak reinterpretation of the black sound of R&B, blues and jazz. The movie gives us the first version of the song, recorded in manager Curtis' car showroom turned recording studio, showing us a wailing Jimmy Early infusing the song with fun and lots of Detroit, Motor City heat. The second version is bloodless televised pap performed by a Pat Boone-esque singing star crooning in front of an open-topped convertible, replete with twin zombie blondes à la Sandra Dee perched on the back seat.

But as promised in the film's earlier scenes, instead of shining the light more on Motown's rising influence, the last third of "Dreamgirls" zeroes in on the (yawn) melodramatic marital conflicts between Jamie Foxx' controlling Curtis and Beyoncé's Deena. It's almost as if the sequins weighing down the girls' gowns have opted to work overtime, figuratively weighing down the production as well.

Director Bill Condon has stated that he was sitting in the top balcony at the opening of the stage musical of "Dreamgirls" in 1981. He fell in love with the production and ultimately begged rightsholder David Geffen for the opportunity to make the film. But Condon seems to have forgotten that movie magic isn't the same as theater magic. He erroneously chooses to mirror portions of the stage production, having the actors sometimes sing, rather than speak, the dialogue. If the whole production were sung, as in the case of "Jesus Christ Superstar," then the audience could have accepted the device. But the choice of on-again, off-again musicalized speech simply doesn't work. In the prologue to Effie's big number, five of the principals are arguing—but they sing instead of speak their confrontations. Instead of working effectively as a dramatic lead-up to Effie's showstopper, it actually diffuses the big moment.

Go to "Dreamgirls" for Jennifer Hudson's magnificent debut performance. And especially go for Eddie Murphy's turn from a swaggering mix of James Brown/Jackie Wilson to a deflated has-been who can't jump the divide between hot soul to sterilized balladeer. Murphy gives the kind of standout performance that can elevate an actor for the remainder of his career.

But Jamie Foxx' Curtis is surprisingly two-dimensional, the surprise being that an actor of Foxx' stature took on such an underwritten role in the first place. Beyonc 's transformation from awkward teen to superstar is great fun, especially with her channeling of Diana Ross to such eerie perfection. But next to the more complex performances turned in by Murphy, Hudson, as well as superb work by Anika Noni Rose, Beyonc  is not a superstar of the silver screen. At least not yet.

Losing steam, the film tries to rejuvenate itself with Beyonc 's new ballad, "Listen." But we've already been listening for hours and this late in the last reel, one more independent woman's anthem is simply one too many.

Becoming a victim of one's own "excess" is one of the lessons of "Dreamgirls"â€”it's a shame that this lesson

didn't reverberate on to the cutting room floor.

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

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[Click here to see the movie trailer for "Dreamgirls".](#)

Production Credits: "Dreamgirls" Directed by: Bill Condon Screenplay by: Bill Condon Book by: Tom Eyan Cast: Jamie Foxx, Beyonce' Knowles, Eddie Murphy, Jennifer Hudson, Anika Noni Rose, Danny Glover Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 131 minutes Grade: B

The Screen Savor: "Sometimes Dreaming" Sometimes Just Sleepwalking™ by Kimberly_Gadette