

The Screen Savor: This 'Lake' is Bogged Down

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "The Lake House"

"The Lake House" Directed by Alejandro Agresti Screenplay by David Auburn Cast: Sandra Bullock, Keanu Reeves, Shoreh Aghdashloo, Christopher Plummer Rated: PG Running Time: 105 minutes Grading: C plus

"Lake: A large, inland body of fresh or salty standing water. Over time lakes may evaporate or fill up with sediment, leaving a bog or swamp in their place."

Like a lake, this is a film of a slow-moving, picturesque quality. The good news: There is no obnoxious soundtrack that cues the audience how it's supposed to feel, no quick cuts to artificially force excitement. The bad news: Like a lake, it's standing still. Much *à* too *à* still.

A romance/time travel piece, Dr. Kate (Sandra Bullock) falls in love with the invisible man in her mailbox, builder and sometime architect Alex (Keanu Reeves). He's a great guy, sensitive, caring *à* and except for

that pesky time problem of living exactly two years behind her, everything would be perfect. Like any earnest couple, they try to make it work: He plants a scrawny sapling for her that grows into a magnificent tree two-years-later-overnight; he scrawls graffiti for her on a side of a building that magically stays intact for her two-years-later discovery; he hides a treasure that she finds under a two-years-old floorboard without a clue. Yet he stands her up at a fancy restaurant, the lout. Does he even give her the courtesy of a phone call? Oh, sure, he's got that trapped-in-time excuse, but enough is enough.

One of the strangest plot problems is that though they're living two years apart, they share a dog who effortlessly leaps the time-space continuum without so much as gaining a pound from all those double feedings. Maybe it's all that time-leaping that's keeping Doggy so svelte.

Bullock describes director Alejandro Agresti as a "painter." Nice, but I came to the cinema, not the Louvre. Who wants to watch paint dry? Though Agresti composes his scenes beautifully, by its very definition a "moving picture" can't be static. The fact that there is such a dearth of forward tension makes this love story drag to a virtual halt. The conceit of a two-year time lapse is interesting, but the audience shouldn't have to feel as if they are also waiting two years between the time one character speaks and the other responds.

As for our lovebirds: Without his Neo/Matrix shades, long leather dress and impossible slow-mo' jumps, Keanu is far more "Bill & Ted" than Clark & Gable. But Sandra Bullock shines. It's a pleasure to become reacquainted with the actress America fell in love with during 1994's "Speed." Her every expression exudes worlds of feeling from her Dr. Kate, whether she's falling in love with the city of Chicago, the mysterious Alex, or regrettably falling out of love with her flesh-and-blood beau. If it weren't for the depth and charisma of this actress, "Lake House" would have sunk from still life to lifeless.

A fine performance was also turned in by Shohreh Aghdashloo as Kate's confidante doctor friend, giving the piece a sorely-needed levity with such lines as "He must write one hell of a letter" and, as a reaction to Kate mentioning her long distance affair, "Christ, he's in prison, isn't he?"

If a movie plot attempts time-travel, then the audience has to be satisfied that everything ultimately fits in place. If "The Lake House" had been made as a fantasy, there might have been a willing suspension of disbelief. A leap of faith, as it were. But since screenwriter Auburn gives us specific dates and hard facts, this leap of faith would entail oh, say, jumping over Lake Superior. Maybe that time-traveling Doggy can do it. But as for the audience? Utterly swamped.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: C plus

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