

by Kimberly\_Gadette

Movie Review of "Superman Returns"

"S": Not just an initial emblazoned on a famous chest, but as the "S" curves back upon itself, so does the Summer Sequel for Superman--again and again and again. Upon first glance, all the ingredients are here: John Williams' enduring theme; the familiar flying credits; the dashing through the streets, tearing at one's clothes to get at the girl. (Wait, that's a different movie, probably not PG.) Even Marlon Brando, still dead, manages to make an appearance. The problem? The stars in the heavens have far more luminescence than the two stars of this woefully earthbound do-over. Q: Was this "do-over" truly overdue? A: Not by any flight of fancy.

Unless you've been stuck in Superman's own Fortress of Solitude, the plot involves our hero's return after five years' off in the mild blue yonder, his Lois having wandered down the Lane, while Lex Luthor looms at large. The world thinks it may no longer need Superman. I think Gloria Gaynor says it best:

"At first I was afraid, I was petrified

Kept thinkin' I could never live without you by my side;

But then I spent so many nights, Thinkin' how you did me wrong

And I grew strong

And so you're back from outer space

I just walked in to find you here with that sad look upon your face "€!"

Brandon Routh as the new Superman. Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Unfortunately, the sad look upon Superman's face is not that easy to discern. It looks a lot like his happy face, his confused face, his lovey-dovey face, etc. It turns out director Bryan Singer ("The Usual Suspects," "X-Men", "X2") was committed to casting an unknown. Mission accomplished. Singer decided on soap opera actor Brandon Routh after one meeting at a coffee shop. Perhaps Singer should have opted to meeting him at an acting class instead. In a recent interview, Singer admitted thinking, "He's going to be the guy or not going to be the guy. I'll know in twenty seconds "€!" This was a \$260 million picture--I'm betting the studio would have allowed Singer as much as sixty seconds.

The emotions that Routh did manage to awaken in me were ones of a wistful nostalgia for his magnificent predecessor, Christopher Reeve. Not just a lovely actor, but Reeve's underappreciated comedic ability made the bumbling Clark Kent leap off the screen and into our hearts. Without a humanizing Clark Kent, the Man of Steel is more shadow than substance. And so it goes with Routh's Superman, whose single black curl is sadly his most animated feature.

Speaking of hair, upon her stumbling into a stranger's den of wigs, Kate Bosworth's Lois Lane expresses great fear--far more than at any other moment in this 154-minute salute to flying effects. Unknown wigs are more of a fright than imminent death? Or the possible loss of her child? I've heard of fright wigs, but honestly -- with more ingenues in Hollywood than Superman could flip a cape at, I can't understand why the filmmakers chose an actress with such little charisma and character. Maybe they were afraid someone with a modicum of spark would upstage Routh?

However, with a beautifully-nuanced James Marsden as Lois Lane's neglected lover, delightful performances by the facile Kevin Spacey and marvelous comic timing by Parker Posey, along with all those dizzying, oh-so-special effects, there was a definite upside to "Superman Returns." But for this reviewer, the majority of the film's tension came down to breathless anticipation of Ms. Posey's next costume change. When the fifth-billed cast member's attire is what drives a movie, then that iconic "S" falls far short of "Super." But I guess "So-So Man Returns" just didn't have the right ring.

Grading this movie on the curve of Superman's flight plan: C plus

Production Credits Movie Title Superman Returns Directed by Bryan Singer Story by Bryan Singer, Michael Dougherty, Dan Harris Screenplay by Michael Dougherty, Dan Harris Cast Brandon Routh, Kate Bosworth, James Marsden, Frank Langella, Parker Posey, Eva Marie Saint, Kevin Spacey Rated PG-13 Running Time 154 minutes Grade: C plus

*The Screen Savor: It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a STUPORMAN! by Kimberly\_Gadette*