

DVD Select: Does mother always know best? Not in this movie

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Something very pleasant happened the other night as I was watching the train wreck of a romantic comedy "Because I Said So" (Universal, 1 1/2 stars): I accidentally turned off the DVD player.

Rather than try to find my place in the movie again, I turned in for the night.

It hurts to say this because I can't recall a Diane Keaton movie in which I haven't fallen in love with her all over again. In this one I found myself wishing her a long stay in prison for mental child abuse.

Keaton plays Daphne Wilder, the too-long single and virginal mother of three daughters: the psychologist Maggie (Lauren Graham), the sex-loving Mae (Piper Perabo) and the talented and quirky caterer Milly (Mandy Moore). Only Milly is unmarried. Mom's mission is to marry Milly off to the right guy.

Her right guy. Not Milly's.

Daphne isn't just a meddling mom. She is pathologically depraved and controlling, to the point of telling Milly what to wear on dates, what to say, how to behave. She secretly picks out the "right" guy for Milly off a dating Web site.

And this isn't vintage cute Diane Keaton stuff. It is a shrill parody of Diane Keaton. It is as if her director (Michael Lehmann) were imploring her to do more of "that Diane Keaton thing, more and more!"

Enough already.

'BECAUSE I SAID SO' - Diane Keaton plays a meddling mother who tries to set her daughter up with the right man in the comedy 'Because I Said So.' CNS Photo courtesy of Suzanne Tenner.

I did watch "Because I Said So" to the end and it got only marginally better.

Psycho mom Daphne employs a verbose description on a computer dating service (that charges \$5 a word!)

to lure the perfect man for Milly. In a weird version of "5 Minute Dating" she sifts through a dozen or so losers until she lands Perfect Hunk No.1. He's an architect with his own firm, a workaholic who wants to change and who orders wine by year and label.

This is Jason (Tom Everett Scott) who is as coldly remote as the glass, concrete and steel mausoleums he designs. Daphne gets Jason to hire Milly's catering firm for his firm's 10th anniversary party. It works and Jason begins subtly modifying her behavior to suit his personal environment.

Ah, but there's a dark horse in the running: Johnny, (Gabriel Macht), a musician with a tattoo on one hand and a rambunctiously autistic (Asperger syndrome?) young son on the other. He's also got a single dad (Stephen Collins) who is - whoa - about Daphne's age.

Milly and Mom do the usual mother-daughter thing which is: "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you! What do you think of this dress? Too suggestive? Good, that's what I'm shooting for. I hate you! Call me tomorrow."

It is ugly and confusing for guys to look at - but really painful when a paper doll like Moore tackles a screechy harridan like Keaton.

So, Milly, ends up sleeping with both guys which somehow becomes Mom's fault because Mom pushed Jason on her and she really liked Johnny - see? At this point I started pulling for Daphne. She may have turned her daughter into a muddled emotional wreck who lacked scruples but at least Daphne wasn't sleeping around.

At least not until she meets Johnny's father. After which, thanks to hot sex on the hallway side table, she gains incredible clarity and realizes what a jerk she has been. (No, seriously, try it. Amazing clarity enters your head ... would movies lie?)

And what of the two sisters. That's another story - one apparently not included in this movie. They occasionally hang around acting sister-ish, urging either Mom or Milly to back off when the squabbling gets intense. Other than a "girls day at the spa" - highlight of which is all four standing around talking in lingerie - their role is mystifying. Perabo's is most mystifying of all. Even when she has lines, nobody seems to hear them. (Middle-child syndrome perhaps?)

Normally I wouldn't spill the ending of a movie, but this one is so weird and perhaps illustrative of the movie's bizarro nature that I must divulge: It is Daphne who gets married.

Yeah, I know, I thought it was Milly's story, too.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Catch & Release" (Sony, 2 1/2 stars) Way better. Gray Wheeler (Jennifer Garner) is about to be married to the man of her dreams, (Grady, never seen) when he's killed in a river rafting accident. Her wedding day becomes wake day. Flowers are still being delivered, but they're the wrong kind.

Gray moves into a house with her fiance's former roommates: nice-guy Dennis (Sam Jaeger), who co-owned a sporting goods store with Grady and goofball Sam (Kevin Smith) who designs packaging for New Age teas and dry goods. Also hanging around this Boulder, Colo., abode is Fritz (Timothy Olyphant) a childhood pal of Grady who makes commercials in Los Angeles and, of course, strikes you as pretty shallow from the get-go.

Good old Grady turns out to be not nearly as good as everyone thought, and Fritz seems to be hanging around in part to pick up the pieces of a shattered reputation and fill in a few of the missing parts - including the presence of Maureen (Juliette Lewis) a flighty massage therapist from L.A. who has a youngster who looks a bit like Grady, but is younger than the Gray-Grady relationship. If you get my drift. (He, by the way, seems afflicted with the same rambunctious syndrome as the kid in "Because I Said So." A curious coincidence.)

Dennis wouldn't mind picking up with Gray where his partner left off. But it is Fritz who becomes Gray's confidant. Over time, the true nature of Fritz emerges and it isn't so bad. His personality is an edgy mix of Billy Bob Thornton and Clint Eastwood - dangerously reticent or reticently dangerous. A curious blend with the bubbly Gray.

One of the most gratifying performances in the film belongs to Kevin Smith. Gratifying in that he's mostly acting, stepping away from Silent Bob. Another gratifying perception: This is a film filled with flawed characters who eventually make the right decisions, if not the first time around. We can all relate to that, can't we?

"The Painted Veil" (Warner, 3 stars) Elegant, moving, engaging - what else would you expect from a romantic drama starring Edward Norton and Naomi Watts? It is the 1920s and newly wed Dr. Walter Fane and wife, Kitty, have taken up residence in Shanghai. When Fane finds his wife is having an affair with another (Liev Schreiber) he vengefully transfers himself and Kitty to a remote village in China where the hardships for an upperclass Englishwoman are unbearable. Unexpectedly in this cholera-ravaged region, the Fanes discover meaning and purpose - and even love - in their relationship. Powerful performances before a magnificent setting and a moving soundtrack. Norton and Watts do Somerset Maugham proud, on whose story the film is based. (Trivia note: Greta Garbo and Herbert Marshall claimed these roles in the original 1934 version of "The Painted Veil.") Look for Diana Rigg as Mother Superior.

Other films: Jude Law and Vera Farmiga in Anthony Minghella's romantic drama "Breaking and Entering"; Roberto Benigni is a Roman poet who rushes to Baghdad to find his wounded love in "The Tiger and the Snow"; Tim Robbins and Sarah Polley find hope and love when they least expect it in "The Secret Life of Words."

Documentaries: The 50-year-long attempt to bring down Cuba's leader is chronicled in "638 Ways to Kill Castro"; California pedophile (safely ensconced in Ireland) Father Oliver O'Grady details his disturbing chronicle of betrayal and the Church's complicity in "Deliver Us From Evil"; and BET's performance-filled "Celebration of Gospel: Taking You Higher."

IT CAME FROM TV

Sharon Gless and Tyne Daley shattered some gender stereotypes as cops in "Cagney & Lacey" (MGM, Season 1); far out, the sixth season already of "That '70s Show" (Fox); they're b-a-a-a-c-k in season three of "The 4400" (Paramount); long-running and long-suffering Ray Romano makes funny in season eight of "Everybody Loves Raymond."

FROM THE VAULTS

Happy Birthday, Duke: For John Wayne's 100th birthday (May 26) Lionsgate is rolling out 12 of his 170 films in double-feature packages. For example: "Sands of Iwo Jima" and "Flying Tigers" or "Westward Ho" and "The Fighting Kentuckian."

More from the vaults: two Tom Hanks films in extended editions: "Big" and "That Thing You Do"; "collector's editions" of "The Guns of Navarone" and "The Caine Mutiny"; an extended cut of "Donnie Brasco"; a director's cut of "Revenge"; and a 20th anniversary edition of "Dirty Dancing."

DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin

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