

The Screen Savor: 'Flight of Fancy'

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "HOLLYWOODLAND"

Hollywood's promise of eternal youth, glamour and dizzying stardom has held society in its thrall from the early 1900's to today. The creators of the appropriately named "Hollywoodland," more a geography of the psyche than of solid ground, give us yet another searing look at Tinseltown--where the only thing that's real is the gap between who you are, and who you're literally dying to become.

Ben Affleck and Diane Lane star in 'Hollywoodland' The film is an examination of the life and questionable 1959 death of television's Superman, George Reeves, as filtered through the eyes of Adrien Brody's troubled, second-rate detective Louis Simo. In Rashomon style, the audience is presented with at least three theories as to whether Reeves' demise was suicide or premeditated murder.

"Hollywoodland" screenwriter Paul Bernbaum plays with many parallel themes: Simo's and Reeves' shared need to make successes of their respective careers; ruined relationships between fathers and sons; and cheating lovers that drive the betrayed parties to mayhem and more. Even as Reeves joyously barbeques his Superman costume, thrilled to finally fly free of the role, Simo's son burns his cape and tights as well -- although the latter burns his costume in effigy.

But it is the theme of aging under the garish light of a blisteringly sunny Hollywood that plays a pervasive fugue throughout the whole. Director Allen Coulter makes sure that we see each wrinkle on every agin' raisin in the sun. The enduring Lois Smith as Reeves' mother paints her withering mouth a glamorous, ultimately clownish red, which makes her snarling lips look even more jarring against her graying skin. Simo's ex-wife expresses her disappointment in her failed marriage with defeated smiles that drag down to pronounced frowns. The brilliant Diane Lane as ex-Ziegfeld star Toni Mannix counts the exact number of years before her figure will betray her, not counting on the fact that Reeves, her 8-years-younger lover, just might betray her first. And lastly, there is Ben Affleck's Reeves, gradually realizing that at 45, his best years are already behind him. Whether he attempts to grab at youth via twentysomething women, bottles of booze or boyish charm, his chance to rejuvenate his career is no more possible than his donning a cape to fly through space.

Which brings up another interesting parallel: Perhaps as concerned over his acting future as Reeves, especially after four poorly-received films, Affleck took a large pay cut of \$2.8 million for the attempt to inject new life into his career. And congratulations to Mr. Affleck--it seems that this Botoxian career injection

may just be the shot heard 'round his world. This actor's somewhat stoic demeanor, which has hampered him in the past, works in perfect accord with Reeves' rather formal persona. By adding 20 pounds to beef up his frame for the role, utilizing his charm and wit, as well as giving Reeves a deeply-affecting depth of heart, Affleck has made this his best performance yet.

Though the added poundage was perfect for Affleck, the film didn't need to mirror the heavier weight. One sodden scene follows another, the concept of pacing all but forgotten. Especially since the theme of gauzy fame as an unattainable dream, a cotton candy carrot that swings crazily, cruelly in front of one's nose, it was a poor choice to opt for all sledgehammers, all the time, when an occasional feather might have been far more seductive.

The film is beautifully shot, slavishly adhering to a 1959 Los Angeles, well-written and with a stellar cast, exceptionally well-acted. But "Hollywoodland" suffers from a bit too much bloat. Too long, too heavy-handed and like Reeves' own bad luck too much.

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

"Hollywoodland" Directed by Allen Coulter Screenplay by Paul Bernbaum Cast: Adrien Brody, Diane Lane, Ben Affleck, Bob Hoskins, Lois Smith, Robin Tunney Rated: R Running Time: 126 minutes Grade: B

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