

Tully lacks energy of director's earlier projects

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 96 minutes

Director Jason Reitman and writer Diablo Cody have teamed up twice in the past with the films *Juno* and *Young Adult*. Their latest, *Tully*, is a little more subdued but features many of the same hallmarks of their previous collaborations, including quirky characters and a very specific manner of speaking. This character-based comedy/drama is well acted and draws attention to some of the horrible trials mothers go through. Still, it isn't as memorable as the aforementioned movies.

Marlo (Charlize Theron) is a woman struggling after the birth of her third child. Worn down by the emotional and behavioral problems one of her children is having, a lack of sleep, and feeling distanced from distracted husband Drew (Ron Livingston), the lead feels like her life is breaking apart. When Marlo's brother (Mark Duplass) offers to hire the family a night nanny, the lead is resistant. However, the idea of a person coming in late to clean up the house, take care of the baby and allow for some rest ends up being too appealing to pass up. And so the young, free-spirited and eccentric Tully (Mackenzie Davis) arrives. While initially crossing some personal boundaries, a deep friendship develops between the two and the employee begins to influence Marlo in unexpected ways.

Cody has a way with dialogue and early sections featuring the stressed out mom include plenty of blunt insults as she attempts to deal with a school-related issue as well as other unfortunate

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developments. While there are a handful of individual moments involving motherly love, the movie certainly paints a horrific picture of parenthood. Marlo is clearly at her wits end and Theron captures her inner anguish, as even the seemingly simplest of tasks becomes a complete and utter ordeal.

The majority of the film details the relationship between Marlo and Tully. Naturally, the younger night nanny's arrival allows the protagonist to examine her life and how events have turned out. The two share personal experiences and advice to one another from different stages, eventually moving into some unexpected arenas. Strangely enough, the influence of a nonconformist helps Theron's character deal more effectively with the various issues in her own life. And as they grow closer and closer, the mother's life and outlook begin to improve.

While it's all well handled, the influence of this stranger leads to a slight problem for the film itself. As the relationship progresses, life gets uniformly better, which means that there isn't a whole lot of conflict in the middle sections of the film. In some cases, one might expect the youngster's advice to be a little more extreme and perhaps even backfire. There are some experimental steps taken that do raise some questions, but everything improves in a relatively smooth manner and there are very few big tribulations that arise over the middle section of the movie.

Admittedly, everything pays off during the final act, but as this reviewer was watching, he couldn't help but sense that a significant portion of the film was a bit, well, uneventful and lacking in tension. The finale does make amends for this criticism, yet one can't forget the feeling of shuffling in one's seat as the story bogs down a bit over its midsection.

This movie was screened for critics a bit earlier than usual. So, while enjoying it at the time and feeling that it has something to offer, it is also fading away a little quicker than anticipated. *Tully* is certainly a good effort that features excellent performances and will work well enough for interested parties to enjoy, but don't expect it to be quite as memorable as hoped for. It just lacks the energy and dynamism of the earlier features from this team.

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