‘Palm Springs’ provides plenty of surprises and laughs

Rating: 3.5 out of 4 stars

Running Time: 90 minutes

By Glenn Kay 

For the Sun

This movie is available for streaming on Hulu.

As a critic, you often see early screenings of films without any idea of the story or plot. Occasionally, it leaves us with much less knowledge than audiences who see promos and commercials on TV in the week leading up to a movie’s release. Often, the only information available is just the cast members and general premise. This usually doesn’t make a great deal of difference, as most titles are straight-forward and predictable right out of the gate.

However, that is not the case with the new indie film, *Palm Springs*. This reviewer came into the movie expecting one thing and found himself surprised and amused as it progressed. If you haven’t heard anything about the picture, it’s best to go in completely cold and let yourself be taken on a wild ride.

All that you need to know is that Nyles (Andy Samberg) is in Palm Springs attending a wedding with his bubbly bridesmaid girlfriend, Misty (Meredith Hagner). They're an odd pairing, seeing as Nyles has a much more gloomy and downcast disposition. During the reception, Nyles decides to step in and help rescue the bride's sister Sarah (Cristin Milioti) from giving an unenthusiastic and lackluster speech. The personalities of these two appear much more in sync (in fact, both of them might have some alcohol problems and impulsive behavior issues).

In any event, they become fast friends, sharing their personal opinions about marriage and life, as well as details about other attendees at the event.

For the first ten minutes, everything plays like a fairly typical indie romantic-comedy. There are a few funny moments early on as the characters are introduced and Nyles breaks out some entertaining moves on the dance floor. It's all very enjoyable, but also nothing that would stand out as being unexpected or extraordinary. However, it isn't long after that that Sarah discovers the very unusual and incredibly peculiar reason for Nyles' eccentric behavior that veers from being completely unfazed by the world around him to being remarkably pessimistic.

What follows is a series of outrageous situations as Sarah joins Nyles in his very bizarre adventure and attempts to figure out what the heck is going on. Once viewers know where the movie is actually headed, the plot will admittedly remind them of other similarly themed pictures. But the focus on these two characters and their own specific ways of dealing with the problems at hand, as well as the effects on their psyches, are different and rewarding enough for this feature to stand tall on its own merits.

The two leads are quite likable as they deal with problems in their own distinctive ways, resulting in several outrageous and impulsive exploits. This is an independent film, so there is more discussion about personal philosophy and finding a way to live out one's life with a sense of happiness. Samberg's character isn't too far removed from other roles he has played in film and on TV, but the character has a slightly darker soul. As such, the performer derives some extra laughs from bluntly stating his bleak future prospects.

His decision to give up on everything and embrace the fact that, in his own words, nothing matters, is quite funny in this story.

Milioti has a lot material to work with as well, running through the gamut of emotions from shock and surprise to anger and pro-activeness over the course of the pair's intense relationship. The film also benefits from the appearance of another wedding guest named Ray (J.K. Simmons), who has a very violent and unpredictable streak. Admittedly, despite all of the soul-searching and discussions about the meaning of life, the movie keeps the ultimate revelations simple and sweet. However, it's still a whole lot of fun watching these characters act out in surreal and funny ways.

Palm Springs delivers plenty of laughs and unexpected surprises over the course of its running time, and the eccentric leads even manage to express a few interesting philosophical arguments in the process. It's a charming and triumphant little indie film, and one that will most certainly get viewers thinking about how they might handle such a predicament.

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