

'Kajillionaire' offers a few compelling moments with a dysfunctional family

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 02 October 2020 04:23



Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 106 minutes

Focus Features is releasing 📺 Kajillionaire 📺 on Sept. 25th theatrically in select cities.

We all have issues with members of our family now and again. However, those who feel a little trapped and constrained by their brood likely have nothing on the outlandish criminal clan featured in *Kajillionaire*. This drama/comedy focuses on one particular group member and her frustrating and surreal experiences with her family.

Old Dolio Dyne (Evan Rachel Wood) is a woman living with her emotionally icy parents Robert (Richard Jenkins) and Theresa (Debra Winger). They're a poor family residing in an abandoned office area of a soap suds factory, paying under-the-table rent and eking out a few bucks via a series of small-time scams. After falling behind on their payments, the family encounters Melanie Whitacre (Gina Rodriguez), a woman curious about their peculiar lifestyle. Flattered, Robert and Theresa take Melanie in, hoping she can help them pull off their biggest con yet.

However, Old Dolio begins to feel jealous when her parents fawn over this new arrival. She

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ultimately wonders if it might be time to search for her own identity and break free from her parent's controlling grasp.

It is funny to see the family's odd makeshift home in an empty office and its various issues, particularly the large soap suds that seep through the walls from the attached factory (which is what caused the owner to shut down the area in the first place). Some of the scams are amusing to witness as well, including an overly elaborate lost luggage scheme that requires the family to travel great distances via airplane and never actually enjoy their destination. Old Dolio's child-like behavior is often bizarre to watch, but she is an easy character to sympathize with since her family exudes extreme dysfunction in just about every scene. And despite being generally awful people, Robert and Theresa (well-played by Jenkins and Winger) do occasionally deliver a funny observation or comment on their various plots.

While the film is well-performed and has a nice message about an awkward woman in arrested development learning to break away from her maladjusted family and find a new life, it is aggressively quirky and filled with extreme and exaggerated behavior. That means that your enjoyment of the feature may depend on whether or not you share a similar and very particular sense of humor.

While some of the scams were amusing to this reviewer, not all of the repetitive schemes make an impression. A few of the shakedowns are so deeply flawed and the behavior of the leads so witless, that it seems hard to believe that a family who has been doing this for decades hasn't improved its techniques. Melanie provides a much-needed bit of normality and the movie does explain her rationale for wanting to join the clan, but given just how odd these rip-off artists are, it still comes across as a stretch. It also takes an awfully long time for Old Dolio and her parents to finally begin turning on one another.

Still, when the movie switches gears and focuses in on the conflict, drama, and deceit between the leads, the performers do get the opportunity to shine a little more.

The exceptional cast does create some amusing moments in *Kajillionaire*, but this reviewer will admit that he doesn't really share the same sense of humor as the filmmakers, and its strong eccentricities often distance one from the characters, instead of pulling them into this very weird world. The movie ends up generating a laugh or two and delivering a few compelling moments, but by the end credits the final haul doesn't feel as weighty or impressive as it could have been.

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