

‘Rosaline’ lacks chemistry, despite talented cast

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 96 minutes

This feature film from 20th Century Studios will debut as a Hulu Original on Oct. 14. It will be available on Disney+ in some international territories.

A few weeks back, this reviewer screened a Netflix romantic comedy very loosely inspired by “Romeo & Juliet” from William Shakespeare. After a short period of recovery, a new movie is now arriving on Hulu that presents yet another twist on the same classic. “Rosaline” is a rom-com that focuses on the cousin of one of the two doomed lovers and focuses on her attempts to foil their relationship.

Admittedly, it will serve as acceptably frothy entertainment for tweens and is a slight improvement over the Netflix effort. But despite the higher production values on display, there’s little else about this film that makes a lasting impression.

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The movie takes an intentionally anachronistic and modern approach to the story, with protagonist Rosaline Capulet (Kaitlyn Dever) outwardly expressing disdain towards potential suitors and attempts by her father (Bradley Whitford) to arrange a marriage. Instead, she secretly spends her evenings being wooed in the arms of the affectionate but slightly dim-witted Romeo Montague (Kyle Allen).

Things change after he declares his love for her and she fails to reciprocate. Rosaline soon discovers that he has moved on and is dating her cousin, Juliet (Isabela Merced). Ignoring the advice of her friend Paris (Spencer Stevenson) and nurse (Minnie Driver), the protagonist schemes to break the new couple apart. To accomplish her goals, she even asks for assistance from Dario (Sean Teale), a handsome potential suitor whom she initially despises.

The production value on display is impressive with plenty of elaborate and well-photographed period costumes and sets. It is an attractive movie and a few of the early jokes do work.

A scene in which Rosaline witnesses Romeo sneaking onto the grounds and picking flowers before suddenly turning and scurrying away from her balcony in a completely different direction earns a laugh. The adult guardians, including Rosaline's father and her nurse, also manage to deliver an amusing line or two (including her dad's comment after she makes up an excuse for the strange noises emanating from her chambers at night).

But the cast can only do so much with the written material. Unfortunately, Rosaline isn't nearly as clever as everyone tells her she is. In fact, the lead largely creates all of her own problems and ends up endangering those around her in the process. Her tricks don't come across as particularly devious or amusing and one wonders why even the slow Romeo and naïve Juliet would be so easily taken.

A deeply flawed central character can certainly help generate and create humor with an obsessive, jealous and ill-advised mission, but the screenplay appears to like the character too much to poke fun at her poor decisions and character flaws. Instead, the viewer is forced to wait for Rosaline to come around and figure out what is plainly obvious from the outset.

And the finale, in which Rosaline attempts to right the wrongs she has committed, bring all of the central and supporting characters together and a trick pulled on many of them falls

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completely flat. It’s all played very broadly and, even in a light-hearted teenage rom-com, isn’t convincing, exciting or amusing. In fact, the only positive thing about the climax is that it ties things up abruptly and allows for the credits to roll a few minutes earlier than expected.

The talented cast are all trying their hardest and, as mentioned, it is slightly better than another recent title based around the same property. Still, there isn’t much chemistry on display in “Rosaline” and it all ends up feeling rote, predictable and ineffective. Even with a lack of romantic charm, the final product fails to elicit enough laughs to work as a simple comedy. Young viewers will certainly be more forgiving, but this rom-com generally limps and arrives at the finish line pale and anemic.

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