

‘Spirited’ lacks lasting power

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

out of <<<<<<

Running Time: 127 minutes

This Apple Original Film will be in movie theaters in some markets and be available globally on Apple TV+ on Nov. 18.

In recent years, it seems as if this season is inundated with various new holiday-themed comedies, most hoping to become a perennial favorite. But for every success story like “A Christmas Story” (1983), “Scrooged” (1988), “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation” (1989), “Home Alone” (1990), “Love Actually” (2003), “Bad Santa” (2003) and “Elf” (2003) come many more that don’t quite hit the mark. The musical comedy “Spirited” is intriguing in that the lead performer already has a film noted above. It presents a nifty twist on a familiar concept and is a pleasant, well-intentioned effort that delivers a few laughs. However, it is also overlong and doesn’t do quite enough to stand above the crowd.

Inspired by the Charles Dickens classic “A Christmas Carol,” this story focuses on the

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behind-the-scenes work of the ghosts who visit miserly souls in an attempt to scare them into becoming better human beings. Primarily, the spirit known as Present (Will Ferrell). After he, Past (Sunita Mani) and Yet-to-Come (voiced by Tracy Morgan) successfully turn another grouch around, the protagonist begins to question the easy targets being picked by superior Jacob Marley (Patrick Page).

He soon becomes determined to convert an “irredeemable” soul. The figure standing out in Present’s mind is Clint Briggs (Ryan Reynolds) who runs a public relations agency specializing in publicizing lies. But when the protagonist sets out to change Briggs, he discovers that the figure is charismatic and masterly manipulative. Present soon begins to question his own work and existence.

As previously mentioned, the premise has a great deal of potential and when the two central characters are onscreen there is plenty of amusing debate and funny comments. The role of Present suits Ferrell well, initially playing the figure as kind and polite before his 200-year-old backstory is revealed. The ghost character also has a few nice romantic moments with Briggs’s put-upon assistant Kimberly (Octavia Spencer).

Reynolds is equally fun (and has even more to do) as the cutthroat Briggs. The man entertainingly critiques some of the recreated memories from his childhood while probing Present for cracks that might turn him into an ally. When the pair sing and dance together about being bad, it results in the film’s musical highlight.

These moments are fun, but they are largely found in the middle of the picture. And as good as they are, one wishes that Briggs had been more overtly nasty early on. While he is repeatedly deemed irredeemable and talks about doing some dastardly things, it’s all played in a light, breezy manner. He doesn’t come across as a truly vicious and cunning adversary for Present.

This seems like a missed opportunity that would allow the stars to butt heads in a more comedically confrontational way.

It also takes a while for the plot to get rolling because early sections lean so heavily on musical numbers. They are elaborate and feature cameras spinning around the dozens of dancers on grand sets, but there is an overly indulgent amount of them. And frankly, while there are

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amusing lines in a few of the tunes, the songs themselves don’t make a lasting impression.

The sentimental final act also veers back into these dance productions and various asides to wrap up every subplot. As a result, it all ends up feeling a bit dragged out.

This all sounds overly critical, as it is a well-mounted and perfectly decent holiday film. The performers are likable and there is an amusing quip here and there.

But it also feels bloated and for all the chuckles there aren’t any truly big laughs or lasting moments that stay with you. If you’re looking for genial seasonal entertainment, “Spirited” should serve you reasonably well. But it seems unlikely this nice movie will have the same kind of lasting power had there been more cutting commentary.

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