

'My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3' isn't a winning rom-com

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 92 minutes

This title from Focus Features opens exclusively at cinemas on Friday, Sept. 8.

It's been a little more than 20 years now since the romantic comedy *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* surprised the industry. The film charmed audiences, was well-received by the press, became a worldwide box office phenomenon and earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay. A lesser sequel followed in 2016 and now a third film has unexpectedly arrived.

The new locale adds a bit of freshness to *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3*, but it also doesn't feel essential and is likely only suited to those who really want to catch up with these particular characters.

The story begins after the passing of Portokalos family patriarch Gus (originally played by the

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late Michael Constantine). With mother Maria (Lainie Kazan) now suffering from dementia, Toula (Nia Vardalos) decides to lead the family abroad and fulfill the final wish of her father. It involves visiting the Greek village Gus grew up in and delivering a diary about his life to cousins and childhood friends.

A reunion is arranged by town mayor Victory (Melina Kotselou), and so Toula, her husband Ian Miller (John Corbett) and daughter Paris (Elena Kampouris), fly to Greece. Also joining them is Toula's brother Nick (Louis Mandylor), aunts Voula (Andrea Martin) and Frieda (Maria Vacratsis), as well as Aristotle (Elias Kacavas), a young man who recently dated Paris. Unfortunately, they all get a shock after reaching their destination. The village is nearly deserted and no one has officially agreed to attend the reunion.

Those who recall the original will remember that the humor was very broad and the family members were presented in an over-the-top manner, bluntly interjecting in personal conversations and regularly offering less-than-helpful advice. It was anything but subtle and after two decades the approach hasn't changed.

Honestly, it's jarring early on to see the same comic techniques employed (but with the dramatic stakes much lower). When extended family members arrive at the airport and cause trouble on the flight, it doesn't generate laughs and appears preposterous. There's a dated feel to the proceedings that might make viewers wonder if they have traveled back in time.

But as awkward as the first act is, things slowly improve after the leads arrive at the remote village and end up being forced to lodge together. It may simply be a matter of getting used to the old-fashioned humor and overly earnest delivery, but there are some yuks as Toula travels to a nearby city in order to try and hunt down family members. The confused reactions of Ian to various locals appearing unannounced at the door garners laughs. A running gag involving Nick's unpleasant public body grooming habits also hits the mark, as does the payoff to a scene involving daughter Paris sneaking away to visit a nude beach.

The Greek locations are also gorgeous to behold and manage to add some visual pizzazz as the characters explore their surroundings. And the cast do all seem to be happy to be in each other's company once again, which does help add some charm to the proceedings (even if the central story doesn't offer much of an opportunity to deliver either comedic conflict or straight-faced drama to the proceedings).

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In the end, the movie requires some patience in order to get back on its old wavelength. Elements do feel on-the-nose and more gags whiff than actually hit the mark. And this is faint praise, but somehow the cast do manage to generate a few laughs out of the material and the nice backdrops make the entire exercise feel more pleasant than grating (for those still wondering, the screenplay does manage to find a way to squeeze some nuptials into the story).

My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3 is certainly not an awards contender and isn't even a particularly winning rom-com, but it is an affable effort that, after a lot of effort, ultimately manages to improve upon its immediate predecessor.

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