

Mother's Day takes the stale, schmaltzy route

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 29 April 2016 04:39



Rating: « out of 4 stars

Running Time: 118 min.

No matter what you may read in the coming paragraphs, make no mistake, I appreciate the work of director Garry Marshall. Growing up, he was responsible for two of my favorite TV shows (*Laverne & Shirley* and *Happy Days*) and has had popular hits on the big screen with titles like *Pretty Woman*. However, over the past few years he's delivered a pair of ensemble comedies (*New Year's Eve* and *Valentine's Day*) that I haven't cared for. Clearly inspired by the excellent Christmas-set 2003 hit *Love Actually* , neither of them have come even close to attaining that sharp balance of humor and warmth.

Mother's Day is the latest in his series of films based around holidays. And let me tell you, I really, really disliked it. To be blunt, it just doesn't work... at all... on any level. The jokes are stale and the drama interspersed is pure schmaltz. I can't believe I'm writing this, but it was so ineffective that it actually made me wish that I was watching *New Year's Eve* again instead. This latest picture is the worst of a bad batch.

Set in Atlanta, the loosely interconnected stories follow several families going through turmoil. Sandy (Jennifer Aniston) is the mother of two boys who becomes incensed when her ex-husband Henry (Timothy Olyphant) remarries a much younger woman named Tina (Shay Mitchell). Bradley (Jason Sudekis) is a widower tasked with raising two teenage daughters and figuring out how to deal with the loss of his wife.

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Sisters and moms Jesse (Kate Hudson) and Gabi (Sarah Chalke) are forced to deal with their bigoted parents, who arrive unexpectedly to meet the pair's significant others. Kristin (Britt Robertson) is an adoptee who lives with her comedian boyfriend Zack (Jack Whitehall) and newborn, but can't commit to marriage. And finally, Miranda (Julia Roberts) is a career-obsessed host on the Home Shopping Network who harbors her own issues about parenthood.

It's a lengthy list of plotlines and it's obvious where they're all going from the start. Unfortunately, the screenplay doesn't do much for its female characters, or the plight of mothers in general. As written, the lead characters are the sole creators of their own problems. For example, the jealous Sandy acts out harshly against Henry and Tina, while Jesse hides the fact that she even has functioning parents to her husband of many years. If any of them communicated properly with the people they supposedly cared about, there wouldn't be any conflict... or a movie, for that matter. Frankly, it makes them difficult to identify with.

Adding to the inauthentic feel is the overly glossy photography. The leads complain about the difficulties and frustrations of their personal lives, but they all look like they just walked out of a high-end salon. They've been lit to look like movie stars instead of frazzled parents and not a hair on their head ever appears to be out of place.

Of course, some of these problems would be forgiven if any of the jokes worked. During this two hour exercise, I chuckled twice - one of Sandy's meltdowns and an accident that befalls Bradley did earn a smile. The dialogue is never witty or sharp. This is no more evident than during a series of badly written stand-up performances from Zach. He's supposed to be hilarious, yet his big show involves making off the cuff remarks with his infant to the crowd (who are laughing like this is the funniest thing they've ever witnessed) and earnestly declaring his love for his partner. It's a surreal scene.

And naturally, as the tone shifts towards heartfelt admissions and dramatic resolutions, it only gets worse. We haven't connected with the characters and none of it is believable in any way. The performances aren't helped by the fact that many moments are scored by what sounds like Muzak you might hear in an elevator.

I'll always like and admire Marshall and his great comedic work over the years. Just not on this

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title. *Mother's Day* is a creaky mess that doesn't provide laughs or even provoke an emotional response. One hopes he moves in a different direction with future projects. Or if he is going to continue in this vein, that he take a goofier tangent with more comedic potential. Might I suggest *Talk Like a Pirate Day*? At this point, he's got nothing to lose.

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