

A consistently entertaining Disaster Artist features remarkable performances

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

Running Time: 104 min.

I suppose, to a certain degree, how much one enjoys the new biopic *The Disaster Artist* might have something to do with how appreciative one is of the surreal 2003 drama, *The Room*

. This biopic chronicles the making of the cult item that many describe as “so-bad-it’s-good,” as much as they do the eccentric man who made it. Even still, it’s hard to believe that audiences unfamiliar with the events upon which the movie is based won’t be enraptured by the enjoyable strangeness on display.

Based on the non-fiction book, this tale begins with aspiring thespian Greg Sestero (Dave Franco) meeting enigmatic and over-the-top performer Tommy Wiseau (James Franco). Taken by Wiseau’s bold, fearless acting technique, the two begin hanging out and a friendship forms. Along the way, Sestero confirms that his mysterious new pal has a flair for the dramatic as well as an unwillingness to share personal details about his history. As the pair struggles to make it in Hollywood, Wiseau announces that he will write, produce, direct and star in his own feature, titled *The Room*, and have Sestero co-star with him. What follows is one of the most bizarre productions in cinematic history.

James Franco deserves a great deal of praise for his work as Wiseau. He completely embodies the part, undertaking a subtle and unobtrusive but substantial physical transformation (his face and chin even appears wider thanks to some superlative make-up). The unusual tics and speaking voice are all there and the actor commits himself to the actual person so effectively

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that it's difficult to tell them apart (the final scenes show comparisons between the real-life figure and the actor, and it actually takes a moment to discern which one is which). While the part allows Franco to be funny in turns, he isn't mocking his subject. It's a remarkable performance that earns empathy for Wiseau.

Much like the Oscar-winning 1994 film *Ed Wood*, there is plenty of hilarity derived from the tactics used to create the finished feature film. Wiseau is a bold but green writer and filmmaker; a great deal of humor is created by confusion from the performers on what they are trying to accomplish within a particular scene, as well as the director's unusual technical choices used in making the feature (like spending money to build an alley set in-studio next to an actual alley). Thankfully for fans of *The Room*, this is the filmmaker's vision and the performers are forced to acquiesce.

While there is plenty of amusement from the making-of sequences, the friendship between Wiseau and Sestero is the main focus and adds a layer of depth and humanity to the story. Anyone can relate to the ups and downs of friendships, even those that form under unusual and stressful circumstances. Sestero must alternatively champion, encourage and call into question some of the decisions made by his friend. The back and forth between the men is consistently entertaining.

This film is one of those rare instances where one could have done with even a few more details about the people involved to flesh the story out even more. Some of the personal interactions, including Sestero's relationship with new girlfriend Amber (Alison Brie), cause fractures in his friendship with Wiseau, but this development gets short shrift. Still, this is a film primarily about the relationship between the two leads, so the omissions don't come at too much of a cost to the overall feature.

In the end, *The Disaster Artist* is thoroughly appealing, featuring a transformative lead performance that displays a quirky charm. And in a strange way, it's also an inspirational tale about following one's dreams at whatever the cost. Frankly I couldn't have enjoyed it more, and those familiar with the subjects are certain to have a fantastic time (viewers should also stay through the credits for a very comical final tag).

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