

## 'To Leslie' deserves plenty of praise

Written by gallupsun  
Sunday, 26 February 2023 10:53

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Rating: 3 out of 4

Running Time: 119 minutes

This film is currently available for rent on the streaming services Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Google Play Movies & TV and YouTube.

A few weeks back, the Academy Awards were announced. As always, there were a few pleasant surprises and strange omissions (it's hard for there not to be, given there are only five nominees for most categories taken from a selection of hundreds upon hundreds of titles). Most would agree the biggest shock was the inclusion of Andrea Riseborough for Best Actress in *To Leslie*, an independent drama that received little publicity and grossed less than \$30,000 dollars at the box office.

As it turns out, the movie and lead performance did earn fans in the acting community and a grassroots campaign helped earn the title an Oscar nod. But is the movie really that exceptional?

The film is now available on streaming platforms and after watching it, it is a strong drama with a memorable lead performance.

Leslie (Andrea Riseborough) is a Texan mother who, after winning \$190,000 dollars in a local lottery, squanders every penny and becomes an alcoholic. As the story begins, Leslie's entire life is devoted to finding or stealing money for her next drink and taking advantage of anyone to do so. She visits her estranged 20-year-old son James (Owen Teague), promising him that she's trying to put her life back together. After exploiting him, as well as friend Nancy (Alison Janney) and her boyfriend Dutch (Stephen Root), Leslie hits rock bottom.

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Out of the blue, she receives a lifeline from an eccentric motel owner Royal (Andre Royo) and manager Sweeney (Marc Maron), but the protagonist still struggles to break bad habits.

Riseborough has been in many films over the past few years (including Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)

,  
The Death of Stalin

,  
Possessor  
and the recent  
Amsterdam

) and is always different and sometimes even unrecognizable. In this feature, she's compelling yet again, particularly early on when Leslie is at her worst. We see a damaged, drunken individual so desperate that she will literally do anything to get a bottle in front of her.

There are scenes where she deviously manipulates her family before begging for forgiveness, as well as moments of trying to turn on the charm with strangers. Of course, Leslie is so far gone that she can't hold the act together long and her efforts come across as blunt, leading to plenty of tension as a result. These scenes feel very authentic and are compelling and we wait and see if the ruses will earn a reward.

Naturally, one would expect Leslie to be completely repellant, but the performer is charismatic and manages to keep us watching. It's also easy to see why other actors have been so taken by the film. The role requires a lack of vanity and Leslie is in complete shambles until late in the picture.

The second half of the movie does introduce a change as the lead begins to make an attempt to clean herself up. The redemption thread of the story is more predictable and this transformation feels too rapid after all the selfishness on display. But again, Riseborough is so strong that one does ultimately root for her to endure and succeed.

The supporting cast, including Janney and Maron are also strong. Nancy's negative attitude and frustration comes out in nasty ways, but one can certainly relate to and understand why. Maron adds some humor to the serious subject matter as the incredibly genial motel manager. It's never really clear why he finds Leslie so appealing, but the actor does manage to be likable enough that the questions don't linger in the mind for too long.

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I'm not sure if To Leslie is a masterpiece, but Riseborough is great and one can see why it would stand out in the minds of other actors and earn a nomination. She and the cast are also exceptional enough to help skim over the story's more predictable notes, as well as the sudden transformation of Leslie from a mess to a more caring individual striving for redemption (these hiccups are likely what kept the film from receiving more award nominations).

In the end, To Leslie does paint a believable and gripping portrait of an alcoholic and, for a very small independent film, deserves plenty of praise.

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