

You Can Skip This Year's 'Office Christmas Party'

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4

Running Time: 104 min.

Around this season, reviewers are inundated with films up for big, end-of-the-year awards. They're so prevalent that I was actually looking forward to decompressing with something silly and light. To be frank, I'm not sure if seeing so many effective and thoughtful films in a short span of time has just made me especially critical this week, but it certainly makes *Office Christmas Party* look wanting in several departments.

At a certain point, with so many flatly written lines, I literally just decided to note the gags that I thought really worked. This list ended up being very short, with a half dozen or so jokes that earned a chuckle. Otherwise, I was pretty stone-faced through the enterprise. Call me a Grinch, but with such a huge and varied group of talented performers onscreen, one has to admit that the movie should be much funnier than it ultimately is.

The plot revolves around the title event. Goofy Clay Vanstone (T.J. Miller) is branch manager of a Chicago division of a biotech firm. When sister and company president Carol (Jennifer Aniston) arrives to announce that profitability isn't high enough and that lay-offs will soon be announced, her brother goes to extremes to prevent cuts. Clay, his tech manager Josh (Jason Bateman) and head programmer Tracey (Olivia Munn) decide to woo a big client (Courtney B. Vance) by throwing a wild, old-fashioned Christmas party that will introduce the executive to their firm and earn his business. Of course, things quickly get out of hand.

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The budding romance between Josh and Tracey takes up much of the story along with Clay and Carol's sibling rivalry. It's all by-the-numbers and generic material. Admittedly, there are a ton of quirky office characters (which includes Kate McKinnon, Rob Corddry, Vanessa Bayer, Sam Richardson, Jillian Bell, Karan Soni and many others) who have their own story arcs along the way. Unfortunately, too many of them are introduced, leaving little time to flesh them out other than with a single character trait. There's a rule-abiding worker, the nice single mom, a dorky guy who hires an escort to impress his friends. They're not given much to work with and less time to make the best of it.

Here's what did make me smile. A running gag with Clay in which he accepts orders while obviously mouthing to others that he will not be following them (while a superior looks on in frustration); an Uber driver trying to make conversation and insulting her fare; a coked-out client flashing a toothless grin; and the odd funny observation from Josh. There is also an amusing montage shot or two of celebrations getting out of control (including a live horse and a background extra in an animal costume that is never explained). And that's about it. Everyone appears to be trying their hardest, but to no avail. That's roughly six laughs in 104 minutes; no other gags worked for me.

Perhaps the fact that the leads don't really get directly involved in the debauchery hurts as well. They move through the mayhem, but never get themselves into the awkward and compromising positions that the movie seems to promise but never delivers on. *Office Christmas Party* may be filled with extremely funny people, but the movie itself isn't. You may want to skip this year's annual celebration.

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