



A Previous Engagement



How can you not love this film, if you are a (gulp) middle of your life woman who just to-tally changed your life for the better a la Oprah? Yet since it's really all about the beauty of change, it's a film for EVERYONE. There are so many absolutely wonderful things about it, and it's not just because it's about grownups, but yes, that is one of best. It's the sight of Julia (Juliet Stevenson) and her kind of offbeat beauty that really seems to suit her place in life at this moment. It's the old flame Alex (Tcheky Karyo) as that sexy European we fell for or wish we had who is fast approaching dirty old mandom. It's Daniel Stern and Valerie Mahaffey doing some of the worst gringo salsa I've ever had the pleasure to witness. It's the utterly hilarious deadpan hotel clerk (Derek Riddell) and his world weary, I've seen it all attitude. It's the mashed potatoes that never get cleaned up and it's the silent stranger (cast from the crew we understand.) And then there's the beautiful Maltese location.

Julia has dragged her husband Jack (Daniel Stern) to Malta to, according to his understanding, mix it up a little. But actually she's planning on keeping a date she made with Alex 25 years ago. You see, Julia and Jack are from Seattle and he's the kind of sweet but boring guy who brings puzzles to the villa and doesn't realize after umpteen years of marriage that he's supposed to help his lady get off too. Yet she's been well taken care of and has taken great care of their needy daughters who somehow land on the island as well. There are some good screwball set pieces, a particularly good one involving hiding under a dusty bed. And when Julia explains to Alex how she just wound up living her unexciting life, it's the sort of stunner that momentarily snaps us back to reality and gives the film some real emotional heft. It may sound predictable but you really aren't sure until the very, very end what Julia will do with her life. Quit being a librarian to write? How can she stay yet how can she go?

This is the kind of film that Hollywood vehemently ignores. And that's why the director Joan Carr Wiggen took it on. It's popular to joke about "older" people having sex or the director who says don't ever make me look at someone that age again...but it's true. Tracey Ullman hits the nail on the head when she, as Dame Judi Dench, says that the Brits are imported to do all the "wrinkly work." But it's not just the actresses, its writers, few prominent women directors, no Judd Apatow gangs of women making films all about female stuff. Yet it's all done in such a light, non preachy, amusing and witty way.

As I said earlier this film is nothing but pure pleasure and not just for middle aged women, although we do have lots of purchasing power and can make our might felt at the box office. Are you hearing that baby boom execs. Quit chasing skirts and wake up. As for you ladies, get out there and show them we want more menopause romantic comedies...and not just with Diane Keaton.

opens May 2, 2008

Written and Directed by Joan Carr-Wiggin, produced by David Gordian. Released by Buccaneer Films and Palisades Pictures. Running time: 118 minutes.

With: Juliet Stevenson (Juliet), Tcheky Karyo (Alex), Valerie Mahaffey (Grace), Kate Miles(Samantha), Simon Woods (Tyler), Derek Riddell (Charlie the Hotel Clerk), Claire Brosseau (Jenny) and Elizabeth Whitmere (Jill).

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