

The Big Wedding: A-list cast can't save atrocious adaptation of French farce

Written by Kam Williams



This picture is such a wholesale disaster that it's hard to decide where to start in critiquing it. I could talk about how it is just the latest case of Hollywood remaking a French farce (*Mon Frère se Marie*) which somehow lost all of its charm in the translation into English. Or I could point out how it's a slight variation of "Meet the Parents" and even has Robert De Niro reprising his role as a macho father-in-law less inclined to reason than to threaten to bust a kneecap or tweeze a guy's gonads off.

Or I could focus on how the production squandered the services of a talented cast including a quartet of Oscar-winners in De Niro, Susan Sarandon, Robin Williams and Diane Keaton, as well as that of such seasoned comedians as Topher Grace, Katherine Heigl, Amanda Seyfried and SNL alum Christine Ebersole. Or I might mention the telling fact that the movie sat on the shelf for over a year before the studio made the ill-advised decision to pump up the marketing and dump it on the gullible public.

Then there's the homophobia and racism, reflected in disparaging offhand, remarks about lesbian and Colombian characters. Equally-objectionable is the picture's frequent resort to sophomoric sight gags ranging from projectile vomiting to sucker punches to the face.

Perhaps most offensive of all is the film's coarse, off-color humor featuring a life-size sculpture of a nude woman masturbating, a seductive wedding guest pleasuring her seatmate under the table during the reception, and a relentlessly-lurid script laced with salacious lines like "I can't believe I'm being cock-blocked by my own mom," "Go [expletive] a yak!" and "My father had his penis in your mom."

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All of the above amounts to a bitter disappointment, especially given the pedigree of the elite ensemble. Blame for this fiasco rests squarely on the shoulders of writer/director/producer Justin Zackham, who ostensibly was trying to replicate the lowbrow nature of his only other feature-length offering, "Going Greek," a raunchy teensploitation flick released back in 2001.

As for the storyline, Zackham lazily relies on "The Big Lie" cliché, a hackneyed plot device popular on TV sitcoms since the Golden Age of Television. It basically revolves around characters going to increasingly great lengths to hide an embarrassing fact from someone until the ruse blows up in their faces and the truth comes out anyway.

Here, we have Missy (Amanda Seyfried) and Alejandro (Ben Barnes) on the verge of tying the knot in Connecticut, when they learn that his birth mother, Madonna (Patricia Rae), is unexpectedly flying in from Colombia to attend the wedding.

Because she's a devout Catholic, they don't want her to know that the adoptive parents (De Niro and Keaton) have been divorced for a decade.

So, instead of simply explaining the changed state of affairs to Madonna, everybody agrees to participate in an elaborate cover-up to make it appear that Don and Ellie are still together, even though he's currently in a committed, long-term relationship with Bebe (Sarandon). What a patently-preposterous premise!

The escalating concatenation of calamities adds-up less to a sidesplitting, screwball comedy than to an incoherent string of crude skits, the crudest being a scene where an undignified De Niro sheepishly sports a substance-eating grin after getting caught in the act of performing cunnilingus between a widespread pair of naked legs.

Look! A falling star! Make a wish!

Poor (0 stars)

Rated R for profanity, sexuality and brief nudity

In English and Spanish with subtitles

Running time: 90 minutes

Distributor: Lionsgate Films

To see a trailer for "The Big Wedding," visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jt9iqJA6RZM>