

Wily 'Ira & Abby' Averts Predictable Hollywood Boy Meets Girl Trap

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CHICAGO – Groucho Marx once said: “Marriage is a wonderful institution ... but who wants to live in an institution?” For the romantic and humorously charged “Ira & Abby,” holy matrimony seems a stressful but hilarious adventure.



Jennifer Westfeldt in “Ira & Abby”.

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Ira Black (Chris Messina) is the be-all archetype for a neurotic New York Jew. He has spent 12 years in psychoanalysis, both of his parents are therapists and he can’t finish anything he starts including his doctorate dissertation to become a licensed therapist.

It’s clear he likes to over think things. When he decides to join a gym, he meets Abby Willoughby (Jennifer Westfeldt): a free spirit in the truest sense of the word.

Within six hours of knowing each other, they decide to tie the knot. From then on, the happy couple gets a crash course in in-laws, infidelity, spotted pasts and every facet of marriage they never would have imagined before.



Jennifer Westfeldt and Chris Messina in “Ira & Abby”.

Photo courtesy of IMDb

The chemistry between Messina and Westfeldt works wonderfully. Where most romantic comedies with kooky couples feel either forced or fall flat, "Ira & Abby" only succeeds.

The odd couple seems more like a couple close friends you set all your relationships against. Pair that with Robert Klein and Fred Willard – who play Ira and Abby's fathers, respectively – and every scene swells with comic possibility.



Fred Willard and Judith Light in "Ira & Abby".

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Westfeldt, who penned the "Ira & Abby" script along with 2004's affectionate "Kissing Jessica Stein," no doubt drew from her own thoughts on married life. In reality, she has been in a 10-year relationship without saying "I do".

The story works because it doesn't fall into the predictable Hollywood happy love story trap where boy meets girl, boy loses girl and boy gets girl back.

Instead, most of the viewing pleasure comes from watching people react to extreme situations not unlike common ones people face every day.



Chris Parnell (left), Jennifer Westfeldt and Jason Alexander in "Ira & Abby".

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Rather than relying on the crutch of using therapists to explore the protagonist's thoughts and motivations, Westfeldt turns the convention on its side by painting the absurd lengths people will go through to find answers to personal problems through psychology.

In the season that has seen such loathsome films as "Good Luck Chuck" and "The Heartbreak Kid," "Ira & Abby" is remarkable proof that a compelling and funny love story can appear on celluloid.

Straddling the line between whimsical absurdity and heartbreaking reality, the movie delightfully steers the audience to every corner of what it means to be in a committed relationship.

"Ira & Abby" opened in Chicago at Landmark Century Center Cinema on Oct. 19, 2007.



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