

Blu-Ray Review: Overwrought 'Chloe' Nearly Salvaged By Julianne Moore

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CHICAGO – Amanda Seyfried is a wonderful young actress. She's utterly disinterested in being a stick figure starlet on the order of Megan Fox. Her earthiness and honesty make her far sexier than most of her Hollywood peers. She has also sported an interest in acting outside of her comfort zone, but in her audacious new vehicle, "Chloe," she takes one step too far.

This is the latest erotic drama from Atom Egoyan, the director whose best-known work is still 1994's "Exotica." He prides himself on exploring subject matter that's considered racy (at least by American standards), yet his coldly calculating aesthetic and penchant for overwrought drama often undermine the potential of his material. What made "Exotica" so effective was its masterful unraveling of a tangled yarn, revealing the true nature of characters who started out as complete mysteries. Egoyan tries to repeat the same trick with "Chloe," but stumbles very badly, causing Seyfried to appear understandably flummoxed.



Blu-Ray Rating: **2.5/5.0**

It is Julianne Moore's sensational work in the film's lead role that keeps the film from flying off the rails (at least until the disastrous final act). She plays Catherine, a gynecologist who suspects that her flirtatious husband, David (Liam Neeson), is having an affair with one of his adoring students. Instead of calling the "Cheaters" squad, she hires an escort, Chloe (Seyfried), to seduce her husband. This leads to a romantic triangle (or perhaps a square) that's as convoluted as it is unconvincing. Yet in the midst of this mess, Moore's performance rings absolutely true. She captures the frustration of a woman who feels her family slipping away, bit by bit. She's uncomfortable with having a sexually active son, Michael (Max Thieriot), and feels hopelessly distanced from her husband, who's always leering at her from behind layers of symbolic glass panes. When Catherine finds herself getting turned on by Chloe's sexual encounters with David, the emotional contradictions in Moore's face are mesmerizing. In contrast, Seyfried is unusually stilted, as if she's still trying to wrap her head around her maddeningly underdeveloped character.



Chloe was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on July 13th, 2010.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Screenwriter Erin Cressida Wilson (who wrote the immensely superior "Secretary") adapted the story from Anne Fontaine's 2003 French film, "Nathalie." Fontaine made a point of blatantly revealing the husband's infidelity right off the bat. "Chloe" makes David's identity as an adulterer one of its central mysteries, which allows for several predictable complications to occur, such as the notion that Catherine may be delusional. Unfortunately, Egoyan has a few hackneyed twists up his sleeve, concluding with a finale worthy of "Fatal Attraction" that falls embarrassingly flat. Seyfried may be a voluptuous beauty, but her best features are her striking eyes, which possess the uncanny ability to magnify her inner thoughts. But as Chloe, her eyes convey the blank disorientation of a deer in the headlights. She doesn't seem to understand who her character is, and neither do we.



Amanda Seyfried and Julianne Moore star in Atom Egoyan's Chloe.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

"Chloe" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio), and includes an audio commentary with Egoyan, Wilson and Seyfried, who take turns explaining their interpretations of the film, while at the same time encouraging viewers to ignore them. It's rather fascinating to hear Egoyan and Wilson argue over their interpretations of given scenes. Wilson even makes the enticing suggestion that Chloe may be entirely a figment of Catherine's imagination. Since the awkwardly enigmatic Chloe falls short of credibility, this interpretation is actually the most satisfying, and makes the picture seem better than it actually is. However, Egoyan's dense descriptions of his visual symbolism make the film seem even more annoyingly pretentious. He also delights in highlighting his fetishistic touches, such as an extreme close-up of Catherine and Chloe's high heels. Seyfried seems to be having an out-of-body experience, as she talks about her performance from a third person perspective ("She's so creepy!"). There's a telling moment when Seyfried reflects on how she felt "uncomfortable and insecure" during the first day of shooting. It's clear that the actress felt out of her element, and the proof onscreen is crystal clear.

The disc also includes an oddly edited 25-minute making-of featurette, which includes interviews with Moore, Neeson and producer Ivan Reitman. Wilson says that the "core of the film" is the mother/son story, which was completely sidelined in the final cut. In two deleted scenes, a scrapped subplot is revealed, involving the teenage Michael's affair with a teacher, and how it led to the demise of his close relationship with Catherine. It's a silly subplot, but it sure would've explained a lot.

'Chloe' is released by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment and stars Julianne Moore, Amanda Seyfried, Liam Neeson and Max Thieriot. It was written by Erin Cressida Wilson and directed by Atom Egoyan. It was released on July 13th, 2010. It is rated R.



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