

## DVD Review: Great James L. Brooks Misfires With ‘How Do You Know’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 4, 2011 - 12:11pm

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CHICAGO – You won’t find a much bigger fan of James L. Brooks’ “Broadcast News,” one of my favorite romantic comedies of the ’80s, but there’s simply no denying that he’s lost his touch for character that once made him one of the best living writers. It may not be quite as big a disaster as “Spanglish,” but his newest romantic comedy “How Do You Know,” recently released on Blu-ray and DVD, is a mess, a blend of unbelievable characters, awkward pacing, and forgettable plotting that makes it one of the biggest disappointments of 2010.



DVD Rating: **2.0/5.0**

I like the core concept of “How Do You Know” — two people dealing with shattered worlds who eventually find each other. It’s a common romantic dramedy theme and it’s one that Brooks has played with before. The two people this time are Lisa (Reese Witherspoon) and George (Paul Rudd). The young lady has recently been released from the Olympic softball team, which was the main focus of her life, and finds herself in the middle of an affair with an egocentric ballplayer (Owen Wilson). The young man has recently become the object of a federal investigation at the company run by his possibly-criminal father (Jack Nicholson). Of course, it’s only a matter of time before the two get together.

Romantic comedies are founded on cliches. You’d have to have never seen a movie before to not know that Lisa and George will eventually hold hands, kiss, and maybe more. So, they’re about the journey more than the destination. This journey is a rough one. The biggest problem with Brooks’ script is that these aren’t characters, they’re mouthpieces for a writer. They all have the same speech pattern and none of them sound realistic. To be blunt, I never believed a minute of “How Do You Know.” This is a Hollywood writer’s interpretation of how “average” people speak to each other but it doesn’t sound right. The dialogue is stilted, self-aware, and overly clever in nearly every scene and Rudd and Witherspoon can’t find the rhythm to make it sound genuine.



How Do You Know was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on March 22nd, 2011

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Video

It doesn't help that they have zero chemistry, a shock considering that both of them often do find that elusive spark with their co-stars. Perhaps they were weighed down by the awkwardness of the script and never found the humanity that makes a screen couple feel believable, but Witherspoon actually has more chemistry with Wilson, a big problem given the trajectory of the story. And Nicholson phones it in. It looks like a weekend of work for an actor who has basically retired.

Worst of all, "How Do You Know" runs almost two hours and simply doesn't have enough plot to carry it. There are a dozen scenes, lines, or moments that should have been cut and that could have helped the awkward dialogue sound more entertaining. I love Paul Rudd and James L. Brooks, but I couldn't wait for "How Do You Know" to end. There's not one moment that truly works. It's a true shame from a writer/director who used to deliver films in which there wasn't one moment that didn't work.

#### Special Features:

- o Blooper Reel
- o Deleted Scenes
- o Extra Innings
- o Making-Of
- o Commentary With Filmmakers
- o And More!

*"How Do You Know" stars Reese Witherspoon, Paul Rudd, Owen Wilson, and Jack Nicholson. It was written and directed by James L. Brooks. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD by Sony on March 22nd, 2011 and is rated PG-13. It runs 121 minutes.*

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