

Blu-Ray Review: 'Bride Flight' Bolstered By Fine Acting, Gorgeous Locales

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CHICAGO – A glance at the premise of Ben Sombogaart's "Bride Flight" would lead one to believe that the entire film chronicled the 1953 long distance air race from London to Christchurch, New Zealand. Yet that backdrop merely serves as the launching pad for a plethora of melodramatic fireworks. Despite occasional moments of hokum, the film benefits greatly from its three splendid leads.

Instead of focusing on the race itself, Marieke van der Pol's script centers on a trio of female immigrants from Holland who board the plane known as The Flying Dutchman (dubbed "Bride Flight") to meet their fiancés as they make a new home in New Zealand. Yet a chance encounter with a handsome young ladykiller, Frank (Waldemar Torenstra), proves to have a lasting impact on their lives. What follows is a relatively standard romantic tearjerker much like "Bridges of Madison County" with a dash of post-WWII intrigue.



Blu-Ray Rating: **3.5/5.0**

Sombogaart, best known on these shores for his 2002 Oscar nominee "Twin Sisters," has often been drawn to exploring the long-term effects of pivotal historic events on the lives of those involved (his latest film, "The Storm," utilized the North Sea flood of 1953 as the framework for its plot). He and van der Pol do a fine job of balancing their three parallel storylines as they branch out into separate directions, though the interjection of present-day scenes needlessly muddle the picture's overall structure. There's no need to see the elderly women gather for Frank's funeral, and the cameo by Rutger Hauer (as Frank) during the opening sequence is a distraction. The film would've been better off if it allowed its complex yarn to unfold in a linear order while confining the characters' respective futures to title cards at the end. Such interruptions only derail the dramatic momentum carefully built by the main sequences involving Holocaust survivor-turned-designer Esther (Anna Drijver), bubbly newlywed-turned-infertile cynic Marjorie (Elise Schaap) and meek farm girl-turned-miserable wife Ada (Karina Smulders).



Bride Flight was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on Sept. 20, 2011.

Photo credit: Music Box Films

All three women are well-developed and acted to perfection, while Frank remains the sort of enigmatic hunk whose tragic past has somehow transformed him into a charismatic love interest on the order of Clark Gable. He falls for Ada during the flight but discovers that she's already pregnant. This leads Frank to have an unprotected one-night stand with Esther, who refuses to live in the past like her solemn husband-to-be. Yet Esther's potential entrapment is a cake walk compared to Ada's passionless marriage, which makes "Bride Flight" the first of three consecutive Blu-Ray films reviewed this week where infidelity liberates a woman trapped in a controlling relationship (the others are "The Ledge" and "Viva Rival!"—stay tuned). Ada and her husband's guilt over their premarital fling have caused their marriage to consist of stern glances and spiritually righteous repression. But years later, when her husband turns from pious to abusive, she seeks out the man who has continued to haunt her erotic daydreams. It's fairly easy to guess where this plot is going long before it arrives at its destination, but the payoffs are satisfying even in their inevitability. The scenes between Ada and Frank are steamy primarily because of Smulders's beguiling performance. She's an earthy beauty unafraid to let the camera caress her unclothed flesh, yet it is her enormously expressive face and endearing vulnerability that make her screen presence so intoxicating.

"Bride Flight" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), and is easily one of the best-looking Blu-Rays released this year. Piotr Kukla's scintillating shots of the gorgeous New Zealand landscapes are as visually euphoric as they are achingly wistful. What's conspicuously lacking on this disc is a complete subtitle track for the hearing impaired, since it's only the Dutch dialogue that receives an English translation. Screenwriter van der Pol appears in a brief interview where she discusses her research consisting primarily of interviews with various brides that rode on the actual 37-and-a-half hour flight. Van der Pol says that she wanted to capture the heightened expectations of immigrants and the disappointment that awaited them in their new world. Her amazement at the wide variety of locations in New Zealand caused her to incorporate the diverse beauty of the land into her script. Rounding out the scant extras is a 24-minute behind-the-scenes featurette primarily focusing on the recreation of the historic DC-6 plane and the scenes that occurred in its interiors. As in the film, the best moments are reserved for Smulders, who explains how the direction of her eyes in a key shot will mean entirely different things to the viewer. In the completed shot, it's clear that her eyes made the right choice. "Bride Flight" may come and go, but Smulders is a keeper.

'Bride Flight' is released by Music Box Films and stars Karina Smulders, Elise Schaap, Anna Drijver, Waldemar Torenstra, Pleuni Touw, Petra Laseur, Willeke van Ammelrooy and Rutger Hauer. It was written by Marieke van der Pol and directed by Ben Sombogaart. It was

released on Sept. 20, 2011. It is rated R.



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