

Film Review: 'The Artist' is Magical Ode to Old Hollywood

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 19, 2011 - 4:17pm

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CHICAGO – “The Artist” is the kind of film for which a critic feels an added responsibility. The fact is that I know that a large number of readers won’t go anywhere near a movie that is described as “a black & white ode to silent films.” Eek. Sounds like torture. And yet, I also know for a fact that a vast majority of those same readers would LOVE “The Artist.” This is a stellar piece of filmmaking, one of the best of the year. Jump on the bandwagon early for what will surely be one of the major players of the upcoming awards season.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

“The Artist” isn’t just about the era of silent film, it IS a silent film. As hard-to-bear as that may sound, it is also one of the most joyous experiences you will have at the theater this season. The film drips with admiration and passion for the history of the form. It takes the timeless art of pantomime and proves yet again that film is primarily a visual medium. With so much modern screenwriting being overly heavy on expository dialogue, it’s so refreshing to see a piece of cinema that conveys emotion, character, and theme through channels that have become increasingly underutilized. With two performances that rank among the best of the year, this is simply a must-see.



[Read Brian Tallerico’s full review of “The Artist” in our reviews section.](#) [15]

A star in his own country, Frenchman Jean Dujardin (the lead of the “OSS 117” movies) plays the wonderfully-named George Valentin, a living legend when “The Artist” opens. It is 1927 and silent cinema is the diversion everyone needs from the real world. Valentin is on top of the world, starring in major hits for producer Al Zimmer (John Goodman) and making ladies swoon wherever he goes. One such lady is the lovely Peppy Miller (Berenice Bejo), who Valentin literally runs into and our dashing leading man becomes a bit smitten with the gorgeous ingénue. So does the rest of America as Peppy becomes the next big thing in Hollywood.

Problems arise when Peppy ushers in not only the next generation of actors but the talkies as well. George refuses to give up on silent cinema, even as most of the people around him give up on George. As he watches Peppy’s star rise, his begins to fall. Like a silent film of the ‘20s, “The Artist” features heaping spoonfuls of melodrama, but it’s all done with such wit and imagination that it feels like more than pure mimicry of a bygone era. “The Artist” couldn’t and wouldn’t exist as is in the 1920s and yet it also feels so reverential of its source era. It’s a looking glass view of that time and old-fashioned Hollywood, a trip down the rabbit hole to an alternate universe where things are similar but made slightly more poignant through hindsight.



[Continue reading for Brian Tallerico’s full “The Artist” review.](#) [15]

“The Artist” stars Jean Dujardin, Berenice Bejo, John Goodman, James Cromwell, Penelope Ann Miller, Missi Pyle, Ben Kurland, and Bitsie Tulloch. It was written and directed by Michel Hazanavicius. It is now playing in some markets and opens in Chicago on December 23rd, 2011.



The Artist

Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

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