

Film Review: Good Vibrations for Maggie Gyllenhaal in Uneven ‘Hysteria’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 25, 2012 - 2:21pm

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CHICAGO – Combining late 19th century Victorian England with the invention of the vibrator is a surefire laugh getter, but unfortunately “Hysteria” adds in a romance subplot and doesn’t climax. Maggie Gyllenhaal, Hugh Dancy, Jonathan Pryce and Felicity Jones add to the buzz.



The term “hysteria” refers to a condition that was fostered upon women as a catch-all medical explanation for ennui, depression or nervousness caused by sexual frustration – this simply wasn’t talked about in the days of Queen Victoria. When a male doctor builds a huge practice just by applying manual stimulation to the condition, using technology to invent a vibrating machine is the logical and hilarious next step. The film is a one joke premise delivered with understated absurdity, but also wants to be a warm and fuzzy romantic romp, and that’s when it gets in the way of itself.

Charlotte (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and Emily (Felicity Jones) are sisters whose father is Doctor Robert (Jonathan Pryce), the manual practitioner of curing the woman’s malady known as hysteria. When his appointment book becomes too large to handle alone, he hires a young doctor named Mortimer (Hugh Dancy) to pick up some of the slack. The curing touch is clinical in nature, and soon Mortimer needs to find a way to cure his own carpal tunnel syndrome.

The solution lies with Mortimer’s rich and eccentric inventor friend, Edmund (Rupert Everett). His experiments with the new fangled electrical current causes a vibration into a separate machine. After a few experiments, the vibrator is born. There is also a love triangle of sorts, as Emily takes up with Mortimer, but Charlotte is always lingering in the picture. The last quarter of the film has to do with a trumped up charge on Charlotte and a trial that symbolizes the society’s attitude toward women and their bouts of hysteria.

“Hysteria” continues its limited release in Chicago on May 25th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Maggie Gyllenhaal, Jonathan Pryce, Rupert Everett, Hugh Dancy and Felicity Jones. Screenplay by Stephen Dyer and Jonah Lisa Dyer. Directed by Tanya Wexler. Rated “R”

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Maggie Gyllenhaal (Charlotte) and Hugh Dancy (Mortimer) in 'Hysteria'
Photo credit: Liam Daniels for Sony Pictures Classics



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