

Film Review: Family Secrets, Fine Acting in ‘August: Osage County’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 10, 2014 - 10:10am

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CHICAGO – There will be inevitable comparisons to the Pulitzer Prize winning stage version of “August: Osage County” from the thousands of people who have been touched by the stage play. But in giving the film version a chance, there is the same passion, drama and heat of family dysfunction within it, with a dream cast.



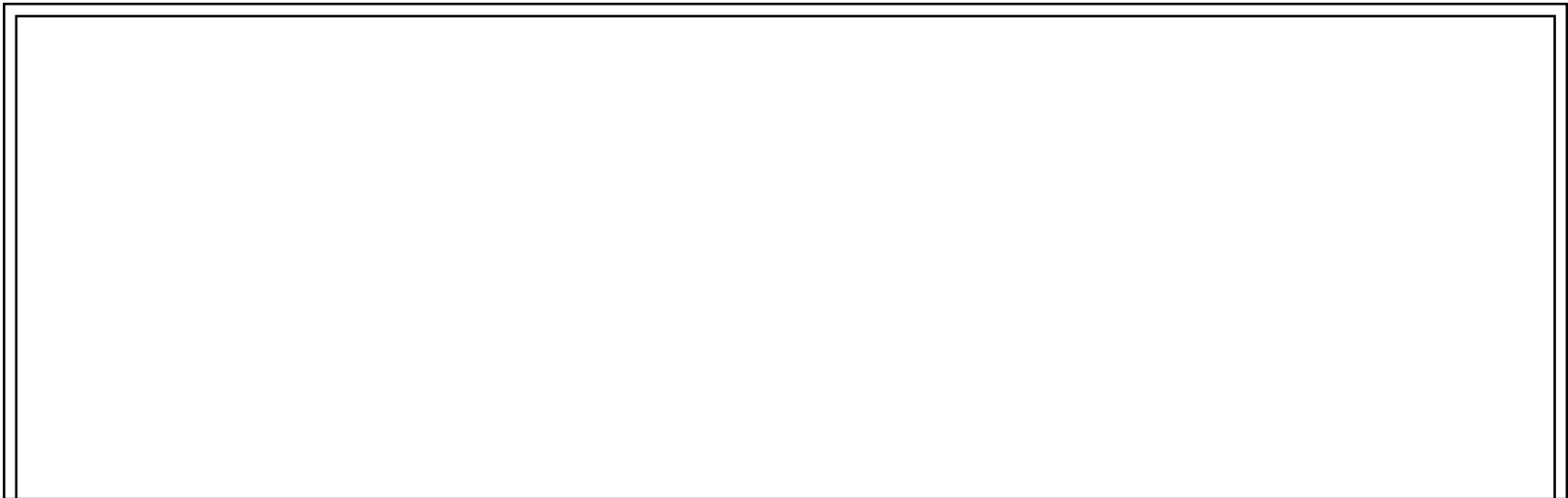
What reflects back in this film is family, and how dysfunction can create a cancer that slowly destroys the connections and appreciation of those relations. The characters represent that inevitability, and interact with hidden agendas all around. Sound familiar? Playwright Tracy Letts adapted his own play to the screen, and creates an atmosphere that maintains the power of stage, delivered by a cast who completely understood their difficult characters and were able to communicate them and create empathy at the same time. Meryl Streep uses all of her amazing dramatic powers in the glue of the matriarch, and her truth becomes a weapon that skews and destroys all. Family gatherings can be like walking into a buzz saw. Step too close to the blade, and it’s curtains. “August: Osage County” is the buzz and the saw.

Violet (Meryl Streep) is the mother of a brood of grown daughters which include Barbara (Julia Roberts), Ivy (Julianne Nicholson) and Karen (Juliette Lewis). Ivy is local, Barbara and Karen live elsewhere. When their father Beverly (Sam Shepard) goes missing, the clan gathers around Violet, while the “missing” status morphs into a discovery of Beverly’s suicide. The peripheral relatives, Violet’s sister Mattie Fae (Margo Martindale), her brother-in-law Charles (Chris Cooper) and nephew “Little” Charles, lends support during the funeral.

The gathering for the funeral gains steam, as Barbara’s husband Bill (Ewan McGregor) and daughter Jean (Abigail Breslin) join in, as well as Karen’s fiancée Steve (Dermot Mulrooney). Violet is prone to prescription drug-filled rages, and her inappropriateness is exacerbated by push backs from Barbara, who is having problems in her marriage. Ivy stays in the background, pensive and mysterious. Karen seeks something she’s not getting. There are emotional land mines everywhere.

“August: Osage County” opens everywhere on January 10th. Featuring Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Ewan McGregor, Margo Martindale, Juliette Lewis, Julianne Nicholson Sam Shepard, Dermot Mulroney, Abigail Breslin, Benedict Cumberbatch and Chris Cooper Screenplay Adapted by Tracy Letts, from his play. Directed by John Wells. Rated “R”

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Ivy (Julianne Nicholson), Violet (Meryl Streep) and Mattie Fae (Margo Martindale) in 'August: Osage County'
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company



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