

DVD Review: 'Cheri' Knows Love Isn't Love if It's All About You

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 14, 2009 - 3:57pm

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CHICAGO – “Cheri” could be confused with an updated adaptation of a Jane Austen novel if its characters weren’t so comfortable with what goes on between the sheets. Like players in many stuffy costume dramas, they wear the best clothes, live in lavishly decorated homes and speak their perfect grammar in posh accents. But since they aren’t sexually repressed, they do it all with a little bounce in their step.



DVD Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The story, taken from a few novels by Colette, takes place in early-twentieth century France, and it would appear that even in those days, people in that part of the world made members of other cultures look like a bunch of prudes. A woman like Michelle Pfeiffer’s Lea de Lonval, for example, could not only make a career out of prostitution without seeming the least bit trashy. She could come home to a tasteful estate where maids and butlers refer to her as “Madame” without so much as a hint of irony.

Madame Peloux (Kathy Bates) lives in even grander style and used to compete with Lea for business among horny dukes and other dignitaries. But she’s retired now and has tuned her attention to her pretty-boy brat of a son (Rupert Friend in the title role). “I can’t criticize his character,” one of Peloux’s friends says of the ever-pouting Cheri, “because he doesn’t seem to have one.”



Cheri will be released on DVD on October 20th, 2009.

Photo credit: Buena Vista Home Video

Aiming to whip him into a more gentlemanly shape, Peloux gently pushes Cheri toward Lea, and the two have an extended, informal affair in spite of a 30-year age difference. Neither one seems to invest much emotion into the relationship. It's just a little harmless sex until Cheri agrees to marry a younger woman for money, causing him and Lea to take turns fighting back jealousy and neediness.

Lea and Cheri aren't soul mates in the most romantic sense, but they're the kind of hopelessly flawed people whose brand of selfishness makes them deserve each other. They each view sex as power, and for lack of experience, they've mistaken their love of that power for love of another person. If the chemistry between Pfeiffer and Friend feels temperate at best, it's because this is a movie about possession rather than passion.

Friend probably has the more straightforward of the two central roles, that of a spoiled man-child who has been treated like God's gift to women and believes his own press. He may not want Lea forever, but he'll be damned if anyone else is going to be considered worthy of her.

Pfeiffer's job is trickier, requiring her to play someone who ought to be somewhat self-aware at her age yet is still struggling to identify what she feels and why. Lea's experiences with high-brow clients have given her the demeanor of a worldly lady, but her profession has left her out of touch with matters of the heart. Lust is not love, but because she has trained herself to avoid acknowledging them for so long, she can't tell the difference. When she claims to yearn for Cheri, she is really pining for the way she was able to dominate him and the way his youthful beauty made her feel young and pretty by association.

Director Stephen Frears and screenwriter Christopher Hampton (who collaborated with Pfeiffer years ago on "Dangerous Liaisons") respect their audience enough not to stretch the scenario into a sappy love story, in which Lea and Cheri are Romeo and Juliet or even Harold and Maude. At a lean 93 minutes and with Bates popping in with a somewhat larger-than-life performance, their film is paced almost like a comedy. It's the right tone for characters who are interesting enough to observe but a tad too shallow to warrant pity.

The DVD includes two deleted scenes and ten minutes of interviews with the cast and crew.

'Cheri' is released by Miramax Home Video and stars Michelle Pfeiffer, Rupert Friend, and Kathy Bates. It was written by Christopher

Hampton and directed by Stephen Frears. The film will be released on DVD on October 20th, 2009. It is rated R.

By DAVID STYBURSKI
Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com

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