Darkly Comic Jason Segel in ‘The Five-Year Engagement’

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on April 27, 2012 - 7:29am

- Alison Brie [2]
- Brian Posehn [3]
- Chris Parnell [4]
- Chris Pratt [5]
- Emily Blunt [6]
- HollywoodChicago.com Content [7]
- Jacki Weaver [8]
- Jason Segel [9]
- Judd Apatow [10]
- Mindy Kaling [11]
- Movie Review [12]
- Patrick McDonald [13]
- Rhys Ifan [14]
- The Five-Year Engagement [15]
- Universal Pictures [16]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – There are some major laughs in “The Five-Year Engagement,” good old fashion you-can’t-breathe laughs. But it is also dark and serious at times, and makes some surprising contemporary statements regarding coupling. Jason Segel and Emily Blunt portray the engaged couple.

Although it has some uneven moments, and is apt to go into the Judd Apatow “dirty laugh” mode (he’s the producer), “The Five-Year Engagement” succeeds because it was unafraid to explore what modern couples go through in setting up – and settling – on the monster decision that is called marriage. It’s about dealing with the other person that will be standing next to you at the ceremony, rather than the trappings of preparing the ceremony itself, which was again surprising considering the title. Jason Segal co-wrote the script with director Nicholas Stoller (“Forgetting Sarah Marshall”), and they were unafraid to take it into black comedy territory.

Tom (Jason Segel) and Violet (Emily Blunt) live in San Francisco, and have been dating exactly one year, having met on New Year’s Eve. As they are driving to a party and celebrating that exact anniversary, Tom makes the marriage proposal to Violet, and she accepts. This brings their two families together, which includes Tom’s busybody Dad and Mom (David Paymer and Mimi Kennedy), Violet’s British roots in her divorced parents (Jim Piddock and Jacki Weaver), her wild-eyed sister Suzie (Alison Brie) and Tom’s co-worker and best friend Alex (Chris Pratt). The engagement party includes the emotionally inappropriate toasts, and the couple is on their way.



The Happy Couple: Jason Segel (Tom) and Emily Blunt (Violet) in ‘The Five-Year Engagement’

Photo credit: Glen Wilson for © 2012 Universal Studios

Or are they? Alex and Suzie hook up at the engagement party, and an unexpected pregnancy gets them married before Tom and Violet. Another wrench is thrown when Violet gets into a desired graduate program in Michigan, and the couple decides to move there and delay the marriage even longer. Tom was an up-and-coming chef in San Francisco, and is forced to take a lower position in Ann Arbor. These circumstances, plus Violet's work with the head of her graduate program (Rhys Ifan) begin a downward spiral that not only lengthens the process of engagement, but threatens the couple themselves.

The trailers for the film are misleading, they show the sharp comic elements of this situation, but not the thesis that Segal and Stoller are expressing, which is taking two disparate souls and merging them into a committed compromise, before they take the marriage leap. By throwing in some very real challenges, they up the emotional content to a point where the state-of-mind in both characters are questioned. In essence, they are creating a cautionary tale for all couples, and showing that circumstances can dictate what eventually falls out.

This is combined with several gut-busting laughs, although once the serious side takes hold, there are less of the blatant ha-ha variety. The engagement party is a dark comic master class, combining the awkward and unseemly toasts that people tend to do at such events, with the stunningly improper – but hilarious – tribute to Tom's ex-girlfriends. Chris Pratt ("Parks and Recreation") shines as Alex, the perpetrator of the tribute. When he is the one that gets ensnared in marriage unexpectedly, he continues to be the forthright truth-teller, which adds to his pathos and comedy.

Alison Brie, memorable as Annie on "Community," fulfills the sister Suzie character with a heart that hysterically comes full circle in a confrontational conversation with Violet near the end of the film. Rhys Ifan, always good, puts the right amount of cheese into the academic department head. The British side of Violet is well represented in the Oscar-nominated Jacki Weaver, who spins some honesty of her own regarding the nature of marriage. Overall, it is a strong script, with rich characterization, and the casting choices were right on. It seems that all the principle cast has their moment to shine, and they all follow through unerringly.



Alison Brie (Suzie) and Chris Pratt (Alex) in 'The Five-Year Engagement'
Photo credit: Glen Wilson for © 2012 Universal Studios

One of the significant devices used in the structure of the film is the flashback to the story of how Tom and Violet first meet. It is used as a touchstone – and in a short scene it's depressing – but it builds to crescendo. This becomes highly romantic, but works because it reminds us that even the most perfect of momentary scenarios require more than just a memory of that perfection. It requires that a lifetime of situations may not work out to be perfect, but the compromise and acceptance to get through all of them can accelerate a engagement to a commitment.

Okay, so it's not what you might expect, but give it a chance. There will be the usual laugh-out-loud antics, but there might also be a touch of familiarity when it comes to human relationships. It's that thin line between comedy and tragedy.

"The Five-Year Engagement" opens everywhere on April 27th. Featuring Jason Segel, Emily Blunt, Chris Pratt, Alison Brie, Jacki Weaver, Jim Piddock, David Paymer, Mimi Kennedy, Rhys Ifan, Brian Posehn and Chris Parnell. Screenplay by Jason Segel and Nicholas Stoller. Directed by Nicholas Stoller. Rated "R"



By PATRICK McDONALD [18]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

[17]

© 2012 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 29 2024 - 2:13am*):
http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/18316/darkly-comic-jason-segel-in-the-five-year-engagement

Links:
[1] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq
[2] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/alison-brie
[3] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brian-posehn
[4] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/chris-parnell
[5] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/chris-pratt
[6] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/emily-blunt
[7] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content
[8] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jacki-weaver
[9] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/jason-segel
[10] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/judd-apatow
[11] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/mindy-kaling
[12] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html
[13] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald
[14] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/rhys-ifan
[15] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-five-year-engagement
[16] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/universal-pictures
[17] mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com
[18] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT