

Rashida Jones, Andy Samberg in ‘Celeste and Jesse Forever’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 10, 2012 - 11:44am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Rashida Jones has been a reliable co-star for years in films like “I Love You, Man” and TV shows like “The Office” and “Parks and Recreation” but she gets her most notable role to date in a film she co-wrote, the romantic dramedy “Celeste and Jesse Forever,” opening this weekend in Chicago. Jones’ complex performance is the best thing about a film that ultimately feels a bit too unfocused, almost as if Jones and her co-writer Will McCormack took the opportunity to use every idea they had about the art of the break-up without streamlining their concepts into something more coherent and entertaining. Despite a very strong lead performance, “Celeste and Jesse Forever” is a film that never builds the right rhythm, lurching forward instead of flowing like the films that so clearly inspired it.

Our first notable interaction with Celeste (Rashida Jones) and Jesse (Andy Samberg) is at a restaurant/bar with friends Beth (Ari Graynor) and Tucker (Eric Christian Olsen). It feels like a standard double date. Celeste and Jesse have chemistry, in-jokes, and what seems like genuine happiness. It’s not until Beth & Tucker reveal that they can’t handle the awkwardness that we realize that the title is tongue-in-cheek – Celeste and Jesse have broken up. In fact, they are divorced with Jesse living in the home behind Celeste. How can you move on when you’re still such a close friend with your ex? Is that even possible?



Celeste and Jesse Forever

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classic

Celeste tries to date, meeting a guy at yoga named Paul (Chris Messina) who shows interest and goes on with her work life (where she’s employed by Elijah Wood to deal with a troublesome pop starlet played by Emma Roberts). Jesse moves on as well, meeting a lovely young woman named Veronica (Rebecca Dayan) with whom it looks like he could start another life. McCormack co-stars as a pot-dealing friend of

both Celeste and Jesse.

I admire how Jones and McCormack avoid the clichés of their characters. Jesse could have easily just been another pot-smoking loser, the kind of Hollywood guy who serves little purpose other than to show audiences how our heroine could do better. They don’t demonize either of their lead characters and Samberg and Jones are the best thing about the film. They’re three-dimensional and engaging.



Celeste and Jesse Forever

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Sadly, too little of what happens around them feels as fully developed. Roberts’ pop princess is particularly problematic in that the character never feels real in any way. Celeste makes some mistakes at work and the idea that she can be too quick to rush to judgment of everyone from her former partner to her new client is an interesting one but it’s underdeveloped. Too many of the ideas in “Celeste and Jesse Forever” are underdeveloped. I would have liked a tighter version with the same ensemble with less hanging subplots and lackluster scenes because there’s a lot here that does work.

Ultimately, I felt like “Celeste and Jesse Forever” was a series of strong scenes that never felt connected enough to work as an overall movie. There’s a great scene in a book store where Celeste runs into Jesse & Veronica. There’s another excellent one where she gets a bit too drunk and lets down her guard. And her moments with Paul (Chris Messina is having an amazing year) are effective. And nearly every scene between Jones & Samberg works. It’s when the movie gets distracted, most often by Roberts, that it falters. This may be the most notable leading role to date for Rashida Jones but she proves herself more than capable of carrying a film and a complex character. Let’s hope she gets to do it again soon.

“Celeste and Jesse Forever” stars Rashida Jones, Andy Samberg, Ari Graynor, Eric Christian Olsen, Elijah Wood, Will McCormack, Chris Messina, Rebecca Dayan, and Emma Roberts. It was written by Jones and McCormack and directed by Lee Toland Krieger. It opens in Chicago on August 10, 2012.



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