

‘About Last Night’ Remake Suffers from Lack of Focus

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 14, 2014 - 10:36am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The 1986 Chicago-based movie, “About Last Night,” has potential for a thematic redo. That opportunity seems squandered in this 2014 version, as the focus is just on casting and crudeness, as practiced by co-stars Kevin Hart, Michael Ealy, Joy Bryant and Regina Hall.

It has a few moments – Hart continues his run as the flavor of the moment – but it doesn’t have a specific viewpoint, as the original did. The first film was adapted from a famous David Mamet play, “Sexual Perversity in Chicago,” and that title theme pervaded the first film (as well as it being set in Chicago, which the remake is not). The confusion that the male character feels regarding commitment is not clearly played out in this version, because of a reliance on Hart and the “R-rated” aspects of crude sex references. This damages the story structure, and creates a reliance on the beautiful cast and their episodic close-ups. And it’s not really a date movie, even though it opens on Valentine’s Day, unless relationship negativity rather than romance is the goal for that day’s feelings.

Bernie (Hart) and Joan (Hall) are a quasi-couple who appreciate the heat of their hook-up coupling rather than the emotion. Bernie’s friend Danny (Ealy) has been one year away from a destructive relationship, and cringes at an obvious set-up situation with Joan’s friend Debbie (Bryant). But surprisingly, the two hit it off, and it eventually leads into living together.



Danny (Michael Ealy) and Debbie (Joy Bryant) Give it a Go in ‘About Last Night’

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

That is when the second guessing begins. Danny is not sure about closing the door to being a player like Bernie – who has since shut out Joan because she wanted more emotion – and settling down. Debbie is the victim of this indecision and finally gets sick of it. The newly domesticated couple is in trouble, while Bernie and Joan begin to re-ignite the old flame.

Not to compare the two films, nearly 30 years apart, but what this version lacks is some old-fashioned grit – which was provided in the attitude and setting of Chicago. The movies are beginning to bore with their casual assumption that everybody has a decent-paying job, and everybody is fine about airing out their sex lives. For example, in the background of the film there is a dream to turn a beer soaked Irish pub with some gritty regulars into a white table cloth, \$10-a-beer joint. Well, lah-dee-dah, and that’s just an unnecessary subplot.

The emphasis on Hart – and I’m an admirer – does not help the focus of the main story, which supposedly is about Danny and Debbie. There is not enough exposition to understand why they get together intently, and then why they break up, because if the film isn’t cutting back to a Hart rant every 10 minutes, maybe director Steve Pink figures that the audience isn’t getting their money’s worth. And this is also an instance in which the script is less than Hart’s natural and funnier schtick, because he’s obviously sweating through the less-than-thought-out improvisation.

The rest of the cast is likable enough, but they seem to know they take a backseat to Hart. Ealy needs something more substantial, the camera loves him, and he has the chops even with the thin material. The women run hot and cold, I’m not sure Bryant got any help in her character’s direction, and Hall runs a metaphoric marathon to keep up with ol’ motormouth Hart. Sticking to Hart and Hall as supporting characters (as in the original film) would have served the story better.



Joan (Regina Hall) Deals with Bernie (Kevin Hart) in ‘About Last Night’

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

Having said all that, there is an energy that Hart brings to a film, and he was in full manic mode in the remake. The film looks great too, with all the shiny things and shiny people reflecting brilliantly off the silver screen. It was also a good decision to make the characters a bit older than the original, because in 2014 – with technology changing the dating landscape – there is the fact that people hook-up for real much later than in their twenties.

I love that the source of all of it is a foul-mouthed Mamet play, and it has morphed into a foul-mouthed Los Angeles-based movie star platform, miles from the source. The ultra-conservative Mamet must be seething, or laughing, all the way to the bank.

‘About Last Night’ opens everywhere February 14th. Featuring Michael Ealy, Regina Hall, Kevin Hart, Joy Bryant, Paula Patton and Christopher McDonald. Screenplay by Leslye Headland. Directed by Steve Pink. Rated “R”



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