

Parts Are Better Than the Whole in ‘The Skeleton Twins’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 12, 2014 - 9:50pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Live from the movies, it’s Bill Hader and Kristen Wiig! The two “Saturday Night Live” veterans are “The Skeleton Twins,” and both have more to do than just be funny. There are moments that sink or swim, depending on the “Twins,” and those parts are greater than the narrative sum.

Each of the brother and sister characters are suicidal, but the background of this depression is brushed aside after it’s established, to create a more congenial and consistent homecoming theme. Hader and Wiig are up to the challenge of their roles, but the script by director Craig Johnson and Mark Heyman keep them at arm’s length from a more redemptive reality. There are some fine moments in “The Skeleton Twins” – good enough for a better-than-average experience – but not good enough for a satisfying overall glimpse into their moment in time.

Maggie (Kristen Wiig) is facing an overdose of pills, a decisive moment of intention that is interrupted by a phone call. Her gay brother Milo (Bill Hader) has attempted suicide. As a result, Maggie must collect him in Los Angeles and take him back for recuperation on the East Coast, even though they haven’t seen each other in ten years. While he arrives, he finally meets Maggie’s husband Lance (Luke Wilson).



Siblings Maggie (Kristen Wiig) and Milo (Bill Hader) in ‘The Skeleton Twins’

Photo credit: *Roadside Attractions*

Milo insists that his attempt was a moment of madness, and it’s actually Maggie who is going through the most desperate crisis. She is a serial adulterer in her marriage, and hides birth control from a husband who wants a baby. Milo also looks up an old teacher named Rich (Ty Burrell of “Modern Family”), with whom he had his first gay affair while a teenager. It’s all about the healing, and hopefully everyone has the energy to do so.

There are some marvelous moments in the film, including connections between Hader’s character and Maggie, Lance and Rich. It’s about chemistry, and old co-performers Hader and Wiig have a ton of it. But Wilson is actually the ace in the hole. His understanding of the Lance role – rough around the edges but knowing exactly what he wants – is such a contrast to the flighty siblings that he nearly steals the picture.

Wiig is such an interesting dichotomy when it comes to her performing soul. She is an acknowledged master comedian, yet on “Saturday Night Live” she relied on a several go-to characters that got a bit tiresome. Her measure as a “serious actress” is a mixed bag. She comes alive when doing goofy interpretations of Maggie’s reaction to Milo, but her dramatic situations are clouded by one note emotions. She hasn’t learned nuance in non-comedic roles – she was great in “Bridesmaids” doing a Charlie Chaplin-like pathos, but add some heavy drama and she feels plastic.

Hader, on the other hand, handles Milo with élan. The problem with his character as written is that he immediately goes into soul exploration and “gay camp” mode after coming home, rather than what would presumably be a fairly quiet time post a suicide attempt. But beyond that, he settles into the role and it fits him like a glove. In many ways, he drives Wiig’s performance, she reacts best when he is doing scenes with her.



Milo Confronts Rich (Ty Burrell) in ‘The Skeleton Twins’

Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

Ty Burrell has a nice presence on screen, his type is suited for drama as well as that comic turn he does as dad Phil Dunphy on “Modern Family.” His reformed gay relationship teacher is all guilt, even as he and Milo do a dance around each other. Their scenes together have power, and enough of a backstory to set the right tone, even when in conclusion Rich seems underwritten. Burrell proves he can do both comedy and drama.

The ending of the film is jarring, and in many ways doesn’t make sense, except maybe as a dream. It’s as if writer/director Craig Johnson’s screenplay had run out of things to say, and decided to just let the siblings have that epilogue of togetherness, the one that cements a relationship into forever.

“The Skeleton Twins” opens everywhere on September 12th. Featuring Bill Hader, Kristin Wiig, Luke Wilson, Ty Burrell and Joanna Gleason. Written by Mark Heyman and Craig Johnson. Directed by Craig Johnson. Rated “R”



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