

‘Office Christmas Party’ is Just Ho-Hum Humbug

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 8, 2016 - 9:41pm

- [Abbey Lee](#) [2]
- [Adrian Martinez](#) [3]
- [Ben Falcone](#) [4]
- [Courtney B. Vance](#) [5]
- [Dan Mazer](#) [6]
- [Fortune Feistier](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Jamie Chung](#) [9]
- [Jason Bateman](#) [10]
- [Jennifer Aniston](#) [11]
- [Jillian Bell](#) [12]
- [Josh Gordon](#) [13]
- [Justin Malen](#) [14]
- [Karan Soni](#) [15]
- [Kate McKinnon](#) [16]
- [Laura Solon](#) [17]
- [Matt Walsh](#) [18]
- [Movie Review](#) [19]
- [Olivia Munn](#) [20]
- [Paramount Pictures](#) [21]
- [Randall Park](#) [22]
- [Rob Corddry](#) [23]
- [Sam Richardson](#) [24]
- [Spike Walters](#) [25]
- [T.J. Miller](#) [26]
- [Vanessa Bayer](#) [27]
- [Will Speck](#) [28]



Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Office Christmas Party” summons up a few jolly ho-ho-ho’s, but can’t quite deliver even one decent belly laugh you’d expect, considering the talented cast chock full of funny folks. It’s halfway decent premise is drowned in a sea of unfulfilled potential and weak material that the ensemble can only do so much to save.

Jason Bateman is stuck playing another variation on his nice guy persona. He’s a recently divorced middle manager at a corporate data server company in Chicago, working for the party boy son (T.J. Miller) of the company’s deceased founder. Bateman is too good for the material he’s given but he is consistently able to wring some humor and even warmth out of moments in the middle of the predictable run of the mill mayhem. The other highlight is “SNL’s” Kate McKinnon, generating the highest joke-to-laugh batting average of the bunch. Portraying the office HR manager, she scoldingly enforces official office rules and warns against corporate ethics violations, while decked out in a multicultural holiday sweater.



Kate McKinnon, Jason Bateman, T.J. Miller and Olivia Munn in 'Office Christmas Party'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The plot involves Miller throwing a kick ass Christmas party to land a well heeled client (Courtney B. Vance) and save his failing branch from being shut down by the company CEO, who is also his sister (Jennifer Aniston). That's not a bad premise, but its attempts at raunch and ribaldry feel like first drafts of something Seth Rogen and company might of dreamed up and then tossed away. And the film wears out its welcome with an absurd third act where it inexplicably abandons the Christmas Party premise to engage in garden variety car chases, involving a pimp with psychotic mood swings.

"Office Christmas Party" is also unusually sloppy even for a sloppy big screen comedy. It's one of the movies set in Chicago which has no real familiarity with the city it's supposed to be set in. In fact, there are so many geographical miscues it makes the opening of the old Bob Newhart show look relatively accurate by comparison – even the opening credits look like ugly placeholders that the filmmakers were just too lazy to replace.



Courtney B. Vance and Miller Whoop it Up in 'Office Christmas Party'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The best that can be said for Directors Josh Gordon and Will Speck’s resume, is that occasionally the actors can make the material funnier than it has any right to be. The pair made the amusingly minor Will Ferrell figure skating comedy “Blades Of Glory” and the dire “The Switch.” In ‘Office Christmas Party,” the biggest gags are often throwaway references tossed into the margins and given a comic inflection.

Here are two examples – when the party boy boss Miller makes a reference to the passing of both David Bowie and Prince, or when Bateman’s character refers to hellcat CEO Aniston as being made of nothing but salads and smart water. Those got chuckles out of me, where the uninspired sight gags did not. It wasn’t an entirely wasted night, but “Office Christmas Party” only manages to be forgettable instead of uproarious.

“Office Christmas Party” opens everywhere on December 9th. Featuring T.J. Miller, Jason Bateman, Olivia Munn, Jennifer Aniston, Kate McKinnon, Courtney B. Vance, Rob Corddry and Vanessa Bayer. Screenplay by Justin Malen, Laura Solon and Dan Mazer. Directed by Josh Gordon and Will Speck. Rated “R”



[29]

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- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ben-falcone>
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