

‘Being the Ricardos’ Questions Who Loves Lucy

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 13, 2021 - 12:23pm

- [Aaron Sorkin](#) [2]
- [Alia Shawkat](#) [3]
- [Amazon Studios](#) [4]
- [Being the Ricardos](#) [5]
- [Desi Arnaz](#) [6]
- [Ethel](#) [7]
- [Fred](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [I Love Lucy](#) [10]
- [J.K. Simmons](#) [11]
- [Jake Lacy](#) [12]
- [Javier Bardem](#) [13]
- [Linda Lavin](#) [14]
- [Lucille Ball](#) [15]
- [Lucy](#) [16]
- [Mertz](#) [17]
- [Movie Review](#) [18]
- [Nicole Kidman](#) [19]
- [Nina Arlanda](#) [20]
- [Ricardo](#) [21]
- [Ricky](#) [22]
- [Ronny Cox](#) [23]
- [Spike Walters](#) [24]
- [Tony Hale](#) [25]
- [Vivian Vance](#) [26]
- [William Frawley](#) [27]



Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Being the Ricardos” tries to tell the story of a comedy icon with a star who wouldn’t know physical comedy if it slapped her in the face. Nicole Kidman as Lucille Ball isn’t the only problem weighing down this biopic, but anytime this lead-footed and ponderous production threatens to build up a little momentum, Kidman stops it in its tracks.

The behind the scenes story takes place during one particularly hectic week on the set of the iconic 1950s sitcom “I Love Lucy.” A blind gossip item suggests that star Lucille Ball may be caught up in the U.S. communists-in-government “red scare” of the 1950s, while her husband and co-star Desi Arnaz (Javier Bardem) continued womanizing gets picked up by the tabloids. As if that weren’t enough, Lucy is pregnant, beginning a battle against the network attitudes to work a pregnancy into the most popular show in early television.



Being the Ricardos

Photo credit: Amazon Studio

Kidman's version of Lucy is a collection of tics that won't remind anyone of the real person. She approaches her role – and the laughs she's supposed to be getting in "I Love Lucy" – almost as though she were an alien approaching humor for the first time. Her expressions are always just a little bit off, and I don't think she could mug for the camera if she tried. Comedy isn't exactly Nicole Kidman's wheelhouse, and the film mostly settles for scenes with her talking about how much of a physical comedian she is ... while showing us little more than Lucy harassing her writers for better jokes. Javier Bardem makes out slightly better, but he doesn't quite have the electric energy that Desi Arnaz brought to the role.

The film has a handsome old timey look to it, which adds to a certain nostalgic charm. Yet writer/director Aaron Sorkin desperately wants to infuse a modern energy into his nostalgic tale from this "Golden Age" of Television. His documentary talking head interludes – much like the film "Moneyball" – neither add nor detract from the production, and his script in the hands of another director might have had more pop visually.

But the biggest problem is that he doesn't have anything new to say and there's nothing that Lucy fans are likely to learn ... except that the physical comedy she made look effortless actually took a lot of precise planning to work. The story just kind of lies there, because Sorkin has never been known for this kind of set up, punchline and pratfall kind of humor. The Latin drumbeat of Desi Arnaz in the soundtrack keeps trying to push the production along, but no amount of sex between the leads and f-bombs can make this any more than a reimagined rerun no one was asking for.



The Cast: Javier Bardem (Ricky), J.K. Simmons (Fred), Nina Arianda (Ethel) and Nicole Kidman (Lucy)

Photo credit: Amazon Studio

Frankly the only time the film threatens to develop a pulse is when its two leads aren't on screen. The supporting cast is absurdly packed, including ringers J.K. Simmons (as William Frawley/Fred Mertz) and Nina Arianda (as Vivian Vance/Ethel Mertz), portraying the famous "I Love Lucy" co-stars ... they particularly bring real life to those characters. Frawley is a functioning alcoholic who nonetheless manages to bring empathy and warmth counter to the husband-and-wife on set bickering, while Vance is tired of being the "Plain Jane" on the show and longs to branch out beyond Lucy's shadow. When Fred and Ethel are more dynamic and more interesting than Lucy and Ricky you know you've got problems.

But the main difficulties exist within a story that never achieves a proper arc, and in a Lucille Ball character that has no feel for what made the iconic comic actor so great. In this production, I wonder who really loves Lucy.

"Being the Ricardos" is in select theaters, see local listings, and will stream on Amazon Prime beginning December 21st. Featuring Nicole Kidman, Javier Bardem, J.K. Simmons, Nina Arianda, Alia Shawkat, Jake Lacy, Tony Hale, Ronny Cox and Linda Lavin. Written and directed by Aaron Sorkin. Rated "R"



[28]

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