

Channing Tatum, Amanda Seyfried Can't Quite Deliver 'Dear John'

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Love stories are as common at the movies as popcorn and sticky floors. Despite this, rising stars Channing Tatum and Amanda Seyfried add their own spin to the timeworn plot theme in “Dear John.”

Set initially in the year 2000, John (Tatum) is a soldier on leave when he first encounters Savannah (Seyfried) at the beach, where he gallantly rescues her purse after it falls in the drink. This gets him an invitation to a party that Savannah is throwing, and the first seeds of romance begin to sprout between the two.

In the next two weeks, the emerging couple grow close very quickly, as they find commonality and chemistry through their life's purpose. Savannah is inspired to help others because of a father (Henry Thomas) and his autistic son. John is an Army Ranger with several tours of duty, escaping his home life because of a disconnect with his father (Richard Jenkins), who oddly prefers his coin collection to any kind of social contact.



Let Us Be Lovers: Channing Tatum as John and Amanda Seyfried as Savannah in 'Dear John'
Photo credit: Scott Garfield for © 2010 Dear John LLC

The couple's newly found love is filtered through the various assignments that take John away, but their correspondence – through a series of heartfelt letters – continues to strengthen their bond. It is the events of September 11th that radically alters their relationship, as John begins a series of longer overseas duties. On the home front, Savannah is experiencing some separation anxieties of her own, and the couple's love is tested through perpetual war and the difficult circumstance of being apart.

This is not a conventional love story, and even though it contains the seen-it-before separation between soldier and lover, it attempts a modern sensibility with the specter of 9/11 in its wake. John and Savannah are not the typical twentysomethings of the era, preferring pen to paper over mobile phone antics, and deeply feeling the emotional strains of frustration in their desire to help society (in Savannah's case) and deal with the mental insufficiencies of John's father.

Richard Jenkins is a solid sender in the role of that father, conveying the mixed signal of the hopelessness within his extreme social anxiety, and his endeavor to relate to Savannah and his estranged son. The performance is never false, even though it could be, and is linked to the younger boy's autism, because Jenkins is of the age where it could have possibly gone undiagnosed.



The Collector: John's Father is Richard Jenkins in 'Dear John'
Photo credit: Scott Garfield for © 2010 Dear John LLC

There is also a wide open look to the film, as veteran director Lasse Hallström ("My Life as a Dog," "Chocolat") uses the beaches and spaces around North Carolina to place his lovers in their own little world. Even John's mysterious deployments are shown in context away from any cities, with countryside scenes that are out of place with the wars John is presumably fighting.

And it's within these spaces that the weaker elements of the film percolate. John and Savannah never seem reasonably intimate or even together in their relationship, so the shifts and separations seem mired as an incomplete narrative.

There is a lot going on in their story – war, 9/11, childhood development, socially awkward adults, illness, connections, disconnections – all in a timeline of about 6 years. With the short period involved, and the characters barely aging, it becomes confusing as to what point their feelings are in life and relating. It seems too rapid to feel like something real, more convenient to a screenplay than a natural flow.

The young stars Tatum and Seyfried are movie star beautiful, and both give an admirable performance. It's obvious that they care deeply about their characters based on how they nurture them, it's just unfortunate that their love story won't come along for the ride.

"Dear John" opens February 5th everywhere and features Channing Tatum, Amanda Seyfried, Richard Jenkins, Henry Thomas, directed by Lasse Hallstrom. Rated "PG-13." [Click here for the HollywoodChicago.com interview with Channing Tatum and Amanda Seyfried](#) [16]



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