

## 'For a Good Time, Call...' Has a Stellar Ringtone

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Rising above the usual romantic comedy dreck is an admirable achievement in today's film landscape. "For a Good Time, Call..." is not only funny and unconventional, but focuses on the relationship between the two lead woman characters, portrayed by Lauren Miller and Ari Graynor.

The approach of two twentysomething career women focusing their efforts on running a phone sex service is funny in itself. What is surprising is the film generally stays away from the low common denominator element envisioned in such a premise. The calls are used as high comedy and farce – with several familiar cameos thrown in – and the movie stakes a claim for the friendship of women. The two lead characters are basically fighting their loneliness and find a grateful fellow traveler in each other. Add a kind of glitzy patina to the proceedings – courtesy of debut director Jamie Travis – and the final product has tenderness and a great capacity for fun.

Lauren (Lauren Miller) is at a crossroads. Her live-in lover has just given her the walking papers, and her employment in publishing has come to an end. She moves quickly to find a new apartment in New York City, aided by her gay best friend Jesse (Justin Long). He helps her find the perfect place, with a roommate desperate to keep the apartment intact. Except that roommate is Katie (Ari Graynor), and Lauren was none too impressed with her in college. But this Odd Couple situation has to work, because neither of them have anyplace else to go.



Lauren (Lauren Miller), Katie (Ari Graynor) and their Magic Pink Phone in "For a Good Time, Call..."

Photo credit: Focus Features

Katie is a freelance jobber, and one day Lauren hears what she assumes is sexual congress coming from her roommate's bedroom. It really turns out to be Katie working for a phone sex service to supplement her income. This gives Lauren an idea – why not start their own service and keep all the profits. Katie at first handles the phone chores, and Lauren sets up the business, but as the lines heat up Lauren has to take her turn at the receiver. What follows is life lessons for all, with the centerpiece being the relationship of two opposite personalities.

This is entirely different than what is expected when hearing the term “phone sex.” The premise is original, and there are many directions to go into regarding such a outrageous concept. But this film chooses the most unlikely direction, that of using the energy of the sexual wordplay as a means to freedom from a life that was expected for Lauren. It also forces Katie into facing some truth about herself that had long been suppressed. This is the story of two women who thought they had nothing in common, but by challenging all preconceived notions they end up finding themselves in each other. And just as important, it's laugh-out-loud funny.

Lauren Miller is married to Seth Rogen...so there is Seth, making a cameo as a frustrated airline pilot. A famous director/actor gets in on the phone action, cracking wise as a taxi driver (no, it isn't Marty Scorsese). Justin Long plays the gay best friend almost in a method style, not that there's anything wrong with it. Even Nia “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” Vardalos lends herself to a role, she seems ageless. The supporting cast around the two women add to the energy of the premise, even down to the continuing movie revival of Mimi Rogers, portraying Lauren's Mom.

The lead actors have wonderful chemistry, from the first time they meet in college – with a very sharp laugh – to when they evolve through working together as phone sex mavens. It's rare in a film to see a real relationship develop in such a way, and to have phone sex as the background is a monumental absurdity. It is telling regarding American cinema that it's rare when two heterosexual people express their love for one another, and here it is done in such a way as to celebrate all friendships – very unexpected and welcome.



Jesse (Justin Long) is On the Line in “For a Good Time, Call...”

Photo credit: Focus Features

As a directorial debut, Jamie Travis hits all the right notes in balancing script – written by co-star Lauren Miller and Katie Anne Naylor – and atmosphere. It flirts with the pacing of a screwball comedy, and despite most of the action taking place in the apartment, it does feel part of the wider universe just because the women are using the phone to contact clients. It's just a big wide world of sexual quirks, and why not play it for laughs.

Hopefully after a summer of superheroes and their odd powers, there will be room for a movie that simply celebrates the power of friendship. Of all the super energies, that's probably the one we desire the most.

*“For a Good Time, Call...” opens everywhere on August 31st. Featuring Lauren Miller, Ari Graynor, Justin Long, Seth Rogen, Kevin Smith, Nia Vardalos and Mimi Rogers. Screenplay by Katie Anne Naylor and Lauren Miller. Directed by Jamie Travis. Rated “R”*



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