

Prime

2005, Universal

Uma Thurman, Bryan Greenberg, Meryl Steep

I got a half hour into Prime before turning it off. It just didn't work... I mean, it never really started for me, and after a while it was just like watching a series of loosely interrelated sketches that didn't have much point.

Let's start with basics. Rafi (Uma Thurman) is supposed to be 37 (i.e. the older woman) to Dave's (Bryan Greenberg's) 23. Is Uma Thurman actually 37? Got me. If she is, she's looking pretty hot--and therefore young looking as well, so when the movie finally gets around to stating Rafi's age, she'd already been on the screen for a good ten minutes and I'd--understandably--already formed an impression of her and nothing in that impression had anything to do with her being older than Dave. In fact, I wasn't aware that Rafi was supposed to be significantly older than Dave until she said as much to Dave--outside of a liquor store where he just got carded. From this one is supposed to gather that Dave looks young? Good to know, because until they told me, I didn't know that was an issue either. I guess what I am saying is that movies are supposed to be a visual medium. I know that sound is an important element, but if the only reason I know that Rafi is older than Dave is because she tells me this in the fourth scene, then something is wrong.

But this isn't where the meltdown started. For whatever reason, nothing in the movie worked for me, and this didn't start in the fourth scene, but right at the very beginning. In the opening act, Meryl Streep plays Rafi's shrink, but I just don't buy Meryl Streep as a therapist. The words she says just aren't, you know, therapeutic, and while we're at it, I didn't buy Meryl Streep later on as Dave's Jewish mother either. Come to think about it, the introduction of Meryl Streep as Dave's Jewish mother sight unseen over the phone is just the type of thing you want to avoid if you are going to be making a second rate film. See, the problem with this,

is you are anything like me, you don't pay a lot of attention to the previews or cover art. I figure a movie is supposed to stand by itself and that you don't have to come to the film with specific knowledge, but for this film that would have helped. Anyhow, Dave calls his mom on the phone and you don't see her. She's Jewish, overbearing, and she wants her son to marry in the faith. Fine, no big deal, but guess what, she's also Meryl Streep, Rafi's therapist... and the laughs ensue, or not as the case may be.

See, the problem is, I've already seen Meryl in the movie, and I didn't associate her with being Jewish, and when Dave was talking on the phone to his mom, Meryl Streep wasn't in the forefront of my mind. I was expecting a new actress to be introduced for the role of his mom. Being keen on fixing movies after the fact, I will point out that this could have been solved by ditching the phone call and having them meet in person, or doing it split screen so we see who is on the other end of the phone, but plain and simple, introducing Meryl as Dave's mom via a phone creates ambiguity. And a movie that doesn't flow--like this one--doesn't need more ambiguity.

Here's another example of how things don't flow. Dave is supposed to be funny. He's cute sure, but funny? No. Not really. Anyhow, he's doing this comedy routine of sorts in a restaurant. Low key stuff, he's just doing jokes that aren't really jokes, more like witty conversation that is flowing over Rafi's head. Anyhow, he explains that he's doing a routine (because neither Rafi or us knew this before he tells us), and then the filmmakers fade away, cut the sound, and que in music, and what do you know, but right then we start to see Rafi laughing at these unheard jokes, as the night drifts on. See that's how you do comedy, when you aren't a comic. You imply it. Dave is presumably making jokes, but they aren't ever said, so no one ever has to come up with them in the first place. This is the type of trick a writer might use if he wasn't in a funny mood, or just couldn't come up with anything good.

<Insert funny joke here> Does it work for you? I mean, as a writer, I can appreciate the technique, but it's not something to be

used when a movie is falling apart or if you want the thing to be labeled as funny. <Insert another funny joke here> Tell me, is this a humorous review? No. It's not, and establishing that a character is funny by implying the fact, doesn't work. Sure, do that montage thing, show a bunch of bits that don't really work, but after you've proven to me the guy is funny. Having other characters say that, "He's funny," is no way to introduce a character as funny. It would be like saying I write comedy. Um. OK. How about a joke or two then. Bottom line, Dave might be funny, but in this movie, he's not.

Overall the rest of the movie isn't very funny either. I didn't laugh once, but this really isn't the kiss of death. Not every movie is a comedy. However, in a bid for comedy (or just through stupidity), there is one more bit of idiocy about Prime that I wish to go into. Dave has a friend (who also happens to be the only Jewish looking person in the film), and this friend commemorates not getting laid by his previous night's date by throwing a cream pie into said date's face--as in a thanks for nothing. We won't go into how this isn't funny, just sort of sad, immature and stupid, but what we will go into is that Dave is this guy's designated getaway driver while he performs this asinine ritual. If this was a college movie, it might make some sense, but Dave is supposed to be the romantic lead. What sort of romantic lead is an enabler for an abusive misogynist? Well, apparently the type of lead they put in Prime. And no doubt Dave changes his ways later, as he goes through some crisis, matures a little, and tries to win Rafi's heart over after she realizes how unfunny, and immature he is--not to mention his bad taste in friends.

But I didn't get that far. I only got to the 30 minute mark, and not only do I think that I can guess most of the plot lines, I don't think any of them were very inspired. Here's my guess. Let me know if I'm wrong *{or don't, I really could care less}*. Rafi breaks up with Dave because he's immature, but Dave wins her back by proving he's more mature than most men her age. There's also this running gag between Dave and the doorman, and by the

end of the movie the doorman is on Dave's side. And the stupid movie ends with Rafi eating a dinner at home with Dave and his mother in the finest of Jewish traditions. I'm probably way off, but then, who cares? The movie sucked. It was perhaps the worst constructed film (editing, directing, script, etc.) that I've seen in a long time. And please, just because I didn't put acting in that list, don't be thinking that through all of this Meryl Streep found a way to shine. She didn't.

*{It's odd how negative reactions and emotions inspire me to put fingers to keyboard and pound out a scathing review. I adore Pride & Prejudice -- the Colin Firth version if you please -- but I've never bothered to write a review of that. I guess I don't have the need to purge myself of that, so I don't. Just noting the fact, quiet appreciation so seldom inspires one to write... this one, anyway.}*

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