

'Dreamgirls' talented cast proves musicals can still be very successful on the big screen

Alexa Milan

Reviewer

Clapping, cheering and a standing ovation are not things that generally happen when people see a movie in theaters. However, that is exactly what the audience did when I saw "Dreamgirls."

Movie musicals are a tough sell. The ones that have been released since 2002's Oscar-winning "Chicago" were critically panned and had poor box office draws, but "Dreamgirls" has clearly made an impression on critics and audiences alike.

Based on the hit Broadway musical, "Dreamgirls" depicts the story of a trio of black women who quickly find fame and success during the rise of Motown in the 1960s. Singers Effie, Deena and Lorrell [Jennifer Hudson, Beyonce Knowles and Anika Noni Rose] are spotted by manager Curtis Taylor Jr. [Jamie Foxx] at a talent competition and he quickly recruits the girls to sing back-up for singer James "Thunder" Early [Eddie Murphy].

The girls find so much success that they form their own group, The Dreams, and soon find themselves one of the most popular groups in the nation. Problems arise when Curtis decides that Deena should sing lead instead of Effie, who has always sung lead for the group. The constant conflict causes the lives of the girls to change drastically, and what ensues is a story of greed,

envy, love, loss, power and friendship.

This is a genuinely great film that has something for everyone. "Dreamgirls", which is inspired by the rise and fall of The Supremes, has drama, comedy, romance and tremendous music. The costumes are beautiful, the cinematography is excellent, the script is well-written and the cast is incredibly talented. Bill Condon's exceptional direction makes all the elements flow together into an entertaining and artistic film.

Knowles plays the role of Deena well and looks gorgeous in all of the costumes, which look as though they were made specifically for her. Her acting, though, is only decent compared to her more impressive co-stars.

Rose, a Tony winner, deserves more hype for her portrayal of Lorrell. Her wide-eyed innocence provides many comedic moments, but also allows for some great dramatic scenes with Murphy.

Foxx gives a good performance as the sly and manipulative Curtis, though it is not quite as strong as his Oscar-winning turn in "Ray." Danny Glover, Sharon Leal and Keith Robinson provide great supporting performances as Jimmy Early's manager, the fourth Dream, and the group's songwriter, respectively.

Although the whole cast is talented, "Dreamgirls" clearly belongs to Murphy and Hudson. Murphy, known for his screwball comedies, definitely does not play his



Photo Courtesy of MCT Campus

Eddie Murphy steals the show as James "Thunder" Early in the movie "Dreamgirls."

typical role. He is a heroin-addicted chauvinist who becomes consumed by his chart-topping success, leading him into an affair with Lorrell and a constant downward spiral. His raw acting and wild rock star singing should definitely earn him an Oscar nomination.

Not only does Hudson have an incredibly powerful voice but her acting is amazing as well, which is especially impressive considering that this is her first film. Hudson gives Effie the tough attitude she needs mixed with just the right amount of sweetness.

You can't help but like her in spite of her being a diva. She sings "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" with such forceful passion that the entire theater erupted in thunderous applause as she belted out the last note of the song.

"Dreamgirls" really is an awe-inspiring film. All of its parts flow together into an entertaining, powerful and artistic film that is definitely worth going to see.

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Powerful performances carry 'Children of Men'

Ryan Howard

Reviewer

"Children of Men" begins with the established setting of a typical dystopian future where the world has gone mad and the government has resorted to fascist tactics in order to preserve the peace. However, this movie opts to forego big-budget action sequences in favor of a more compelling and engaging story.

In the film, women have been infertile for almost two decades, and the human race is slowly dying off. After years of estrangement, London office-worker Theo Faron's [Clive Owen] wife Julian [Julianne Moore] re-establishes contact with him. She is now the leader of a terrorist organization fighting to overthrow the government. She and Theo attempt to smuggle a miraculously pregnant woman out of the country so she can have her baby safely.

The film features several impossibly-chooreographed continuous shots. They are relentless, forcing the audience to experience every gut-wrenching, heart-pounding second of brutal violence right alongside the characters. This is not a passive experience for the moviegoer. You will travel with

them. You will feel every loss and share every small triumph.

Director Alfonso Cuarón is extremely adept at lulling the audience into a false sense of security and then hitting them with the startling reality of the situation. The action is often unexpected, and usually unwelcome as the characters [and the audience] have just begun to experience some small amount of relief.

Owen carries the movie easily with his

trademark rugged suaveness although it does not get in the way of his humble portrayal of a man in way over his head. He is constantly risking his life for the pregnant woman because he believes it is the right thing to do. Moore gives a moving performance, conveying with minimal dialogue the emotionally turbulent history she has with Owen's character. Newcomer Claire-Hope Ashitey gives a commanding performance as the strong-willed, pregnant Kee, upon



Photo courtesy of msnbc.com

Clive Owen and Julianne Moore work together in "Children of Men."

whose child rests the hopes of all mankind.

Michael Caine delivers the most enjoyable supporting performance, playing Owen's wisecracking, pot-dealing friend Jasper. He provides the film with comic relief, peering over his Lennon-esque glasses, lamenting about how the government distributes suicide pills but marijuana is still illegal.

Although it takes place in the future, "Children of Men" isn't too "sci-fi." It is simply the backdrop against which this particular story is being told. The film does take several critical jabs at our current society, the least subtle of which is calling the English government's group in charge of deporting all immigrants the "Department of Homeland Security." However, the overall message is not social criticism; but a hopeful outlook on the innate goodness of human nature.

With its gritty, realistic direction and powerful performances, "Children of Men" should certainly be an Oscar contender. Put it at the top of your "must-see" list.

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