

Film Flops Even for Teen Fare

Teen heartthrobs Freddie Prinze, Jr. and Julia Stiles join forces in the latest date flick "Down to You."

By JUSTIN WINTERS
Staff Writer

Meshing the dude from "She's All That" and the chick from "10 Things I Hate About You" into one spunky couple, this year's first true date flick, "Down to You," ends up leaving women fawning and men yawning.

The dude, Freddie Prinze Jr., and the chick, Julia Stiles, had better material to work with in their earlier forays into teen-dom, and this entry mechanically processes the same unoriginal love story into a quick 90 minutes of average entertainment.

Dude meets chick. Dude loves chick. Dude and chick fight. Dude and chick break up. Dude and chick live apart and realize there is no other dude, or chick, for them. Dude and chick get back together and live happily ever after.

Director and screenwriter Kris Isaccson deserves blame for most of the problems that plague the film. The studio that made "She's All That" reportedly drafted him based on his superb work in public service announcements.

Some of the ideas that might have sounded good on paper (a cooking show blended with a "COPS" reality show) don't play out excitingly enough to keep the attention of the younger audience the film targets.

Last year's "She's All That" and "10 Things I Hate About You" used Shakespearean stories, but gave them a little twist that pleased both young and old audiences. The biggest originality of "Down" stems from the cast that backs up the two lovebirds.

Prinze's best friend Monk (Zac Orth) is an up-and-coming porn star who hopes to move on to direct and become a speaker on the college circuit. Prinze's tall, dark, handsome competition takes the form of Jim Morrison (Ashley Kutcher, "That '70s Show"), a loner who does all he can to imitate the late Doors frontman. If there was a supporting actor award for teen films, Kutcher would be in the running.

More than "She's All That in College," Prinze and Stiles do share several scenes that may have them up for the Nobel Prize for chemistry. So if you're a girl looking for a date movie, "Down" is the best choice out there. If you're a guy, just grin and bear it.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

'Affair' One to Remember

By JEREMY HURTZ
Staff Writer

When writing a review, one tries to be cautious not to give away the ending of a film. But it's not saying too much to reveal that the conclusion of "The End of the Affair" isn't a cheery one. That much becomes obvious from the initial mournful violin strains and the first gloomy shot of a rainy World War II-era London park.

Far from spoiling Neil Jordan's adaptation of the classic Graham Greene novel, the sorrow which permeates it lends a certain believability. The characters - cynical novelist Maurice (Ralph Fiennes), his lover

Sarah (Julianne Moore) and her impatient husband Henry (Stephen Rea) - are tragic ones, and they know it.

Sensing the end of his illicit affair approaching, Maurice becomes venomously jealous of Henry. Sarah claims not to love her boring husband; to prove her sole devotion, she initiates a particularly passionate round of lovemaking.

Immediately afterward, Maurice's apartment is bombed (WWII London, remember). Sarah is unhurt, but thinks the blast killed her lover. He's not dead, though, and when he comes to, she leaves suddenly and refuses to see him.

What happened in those moments while Maurice lay motionless is but one of the story's many secrets. Every event in this picture's complex plot drives it to its conclusion; not a line deviates.

The film makes up in sincerity and sure-handedness what it may lack in

subtlety. Only on a few occasions does it slip into melodrama.

Jordan also achieves a few excellent, important touches - like displaying a passionate reconciliation in such a way that we at first think it's happening in the here-and-now, though in fact it's long past in the characters' memories.

Jordan's finesse lets us see how these characters become so haunted by memory. But we believe it because Fiennes, Rea and Moore are first-rate.

All three have been nominated for Oscars in the past. They all deserve it again - especially Moore, the one actress working who most consistently delivers dead-on performances. In many other movies, this turn might eclipse the other actors involved. Here she fits in.

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'Ashes' Spins Tender Tale of Woe

By RUSS LANE
Staff Writer

Four years after the novel became a bestseller, "Angela's Ashes" creeps its way into both the big screen and audiences' heads with an adaptation that even the book's author lauded.

Directed and co-written by Alan Parker, the film recalls Frank McCourt's childhood in Limerick, Ireland with flawless prose-to-script accuracy. The McCourt family suffers a steady decline, revealing each family member at his or her best and worst. Three of Frank's siblings die, his alcoholic father abandons the family, Frank has frequent bouts of sickness and his broken and humiliated mother whores herself for survival.

While McCourt's story is poignant, it is far from rare. The magic of "Angela's Ashes" lies not in the plot, but the subtleties that surround it. Parker's cinematography is affecting, making Limerick's streets as central a character

as the McCourt family. Every scene is a curious mixture of dirt, green hue and darkness - a fitting environment for McCourt's bittersweet storytelling.

Throughout the McCourt family's struggle, its strict Catholicism casts a shadow over the family's plight. "Angela's Ashes" constantly examines the limitations of faith. Amid Frank's poverty and misery, he struggles to make sense of his family and the world within the Catholic doctrine.

The film itself is on a holy mission. Refusing to dissolve into heavy melodrama, Parker captures the dark humor that made the book realistic and moving. He perfectly portrays the McCourt family's sharp wit in scenes that become the Catholic equivalent to Woody

Allen's trademark neurotic humor.

Frank and his cohorts play Peeping Tom outside women's windows, raid farms, learn new uses for livestock and sneak into theaters. Amid crises of faith, poverty and dysfunctional families, the film has the good sense to allow Irish Catholic boys to be Irish Catholic boys.

Hollywood's determination to tell a story better than the original author did is usually the downfall of most film adaptations. The obvious respect for McCourt's novel and the humility inherent in Parker's direction makes "Angela's Ashes" a brilliant, exquisite film worth watching.

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'Play' Delivers A Weak Punch

By FERRIS MORRISON
Staff Writer

With all the drama and scandal that surrounds the sport of boxing, many filmmakers have taken a job at capturing that aura of excitement found in the ring. Unfortunately, Director Ron Shelton's "Play It to the Bone" is no "Rocky."

With no connection between random Jesus sightings, flashes of naked women and the star cameos in the last scene, "Bone" struggles to present a clear message to the audience.

While the film offers an accurate representation of the sport, the unorganized plot is riddled with trivial comedic events and bizarre, inexplicable happenings.

Woody Harrelson and Antonio Banderas star as two washed-up middleweights asked to duke it out in the undercard fight for Mike Tyson. The film chronicles their road trip to Las Vegas and their bout in the ring.

Shelton has several sport films under his belt, such as "Tin Cup," "White Men Can't Jump" and "Bull Durham." Much like "White Men Can't Jump," "Bone" features excellent camera shots during the sports scenes, capturing the drama and intensity found in the boxing ring. The character development and plot, however, leave much to be desired.

Vince Boudreau (Harrelson) and Caesar Dominguez (Banderas) decide to

drive to "Sin City." On the road trip, the audience discovers how each of the boxers failed in previous fights as they talk about their sordid pasts.

Harrelson portrays a tough guy who found the power of religion when he saw Jesus after a car accident. Jesus now visits him wherever he goes. Banderas lays his Spanish accent on extra thick to play the stereotypical Hispanic fighter.

In the boxing ring, the two friends morph into two ruthless fighting machines. Camera shots that dart back and forth between punches draw the audience into the fight. But by the seventh round, the repetitive scene leaves eyes wandering.

In between rounds of tough fighting, Boudreau and Dominguez have odd visions that don't seem to have anything to do with the plot itself. Boudreau sees several topless women while Dominguez sees a naked man. But this isn't really all that surprising, as random and gratuitous sex scenes are scattered throughout the film.

And if it wasn't for a surprisingly amazing soundtrack filled with bluesy jazz and intense techno, "Play It to the Bone" would seem to drag on for hours.

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MOVIE REVIEW
"Down to You"



MOVIE REVIEW
"The End of the Affair"



MOVIE REVIEW
"Angela's Ashes"



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