

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED ____ (5.5/10)

And you think YOU have problems...

Written by Jenny Lumet

Directed by Jonathan Demme

Anne Hathaway ... Kym

Bill Irwin ... Paul

Anna Deavere Smith ... Carol

Rosemarie DeWitt ... Rachel

Debra Winger ... Abby

Tunde Adebimpe ... Sidney

Kym: I am Shiva the destroyer, your harbinger of doom this evening.

"No more romantic comedy for you!"

So some of us probably figured that Anne Hathaway was all set up to eternally perform in romantic comedies (like *The Princess Diaries* or *Ella Enchanted*), in off-the-wall comedies (*Get Smart* and *Get Smart x*), or movies that showcase the stellar acting ability of Meryl Streep (*The Devil Wears Prada*). Well, au contraire. In *Rachel Getting Married*, the normally lovely princess-next-door gets down and dirty in a role that conjures up comparisons to, if not Charlize Theron in *Monster*, Angelina Jolie in *Gia* or *Girl Interrupted*.

Believe it or not, *Rachel Getting Married* is a family movie... indeed, it's the quintessential family movie if one's family is composed of East Coast, well-to-do, slightly neurotic, aggressively multicultural enablers and one's movie aspires to take the naturalist cinematic genre to its modern *reductio ad absurdum*. Don't get me wrong. I'm not opposed to naturalistic movies out of a Randian esthetic dogma; but they have to be really good movies—with at least some positive point for my world—or, frankly, I just don't give a doggone about the characters. Call me selfish.

And I think that's the fundamental flaw in *Rachel Getting Married*. If you're a potato-head like me and you read Roger Ebert's review, you'll probably wonder why he carries on so about how beautiful this rich menudo[1] of all Rachel's (Rosemarie DeWitt's) friends and family is—the black and white (Rachel is getting married to a black fellow, Sidney (Tunde Adebimpe), the this 'uns and that 'uns of all orientations, the music (mostly loud) drawn from street corners or chamber-orchestral quintets, the helter-skelter do's and fashions, the offbeat poetry and the maudlin, streaky emotions. Ol' Rog probably hangs with screwy clans like these in the 'burbs of Chicago.

Frankly, after viewing such a chaotic, stylishly dysfunctional matrimonial drama in the woods of Connecticut, I'm actually looking forward to the conventional middle-America, Christian-church wedding of my nephew in a few weeks. It will be a roaring good time in comparison... even if a handful of routine personality disorders kicks in from the front pews. So long as the preacher man doesn't "sickly o'er the native hue of (the couple's presumably healthy sexual) resolution with the pale cast of" divine chastity, I'm gonna be saying Amen, brother... and even singing a hymn or two.

Guess who's coming to Rachel's wedding

That would be our Kym (Anne Hathaway) who has been 'kinda sorta' put away in a rehab environment. But, through the agencies of her father (Bill Irwin) and her case

people, she can come home for the special weekend to be with her sister getting married. Kym, through a horrible unfortunate family incident a few years ago, has enough pain and guilt inside her to kill the joy and hope of a thousand bridal showers. For kickers, she's an alcoholic and a prescription drug addict. So, yes—along with the psychobabble bubbling up everywhere throughout the elegant, pastoral compound—we get some serious Meryl Streep-worthy drama.

To be fair, Hathaway and the other actors perform admirably. And she renders a (wholly unnecessary yet probably realistic) sequence of what Erica Jong called the "zipless fuck"[2] seem true to specification. And it's good to see Hathaway in a semi-trashy role like this... to clean out her thespian pipes. For the other actors, too, there are a handful of tender moments inside the relentless 'poor me' back and forths: Sidney lays a loving hand on Kym's shoulder in an uncontrived moment of pure decency. Unfortunately, not enough of such sane, grounded humanity shines through the writer's, or the director's, preoccupation with being distressingly slice-of-life stylish.

But no need to be harsh on this front either. Jenny Lumet, the writer, is the offspring of Sidney Lumet, director of such classics as *Network* and the lesser-known masterpiece, *Running on Empty*. This is really her first writing attempt for the big screen, and I can understand the desire to chart new territory. But instead of decorating a plot with cultural diversity, she overwhelms our natural sympathies and attentions with behavioral chaos. Then along comes director Demme—he's done a lot of fine work, including *Philadelphia* (1993) and *Swing Shift* (1984) (which per Goldie, he may have gotten more credit than deserved)—and I feel he simply succumbed to too many trendy voices in his headbone.

Part of my criticism is no doubt due to personal prejudice, not against the rich or colorful, but against so many people who seem oblivious to the ravages of what I call the Big Universal Problem.[3] In my world, the overriding concern is not what to do about Kym's emotional descent or Rachel's sensitivities to fatherly favoritism, rather to how we tackle the 900# gorilla in everyone's living room. (I know, old story. We freedom types can be so one-tracked.) But even most normal people I know who have self-plugged into the comfortable oblivion of *The Matrix* will find the world of Kym and Rachel unhealthfully drenched in self-absorption... and coming at you from every which way but straight.

The average viewer will get drawn into the plot—what there is of it—so we start caring and worrying about Kym, wondering whether she's recovering or being dishonest. This leads to consideration of Kym's family: Is her divorced mother Abby (Debra Winger) a hit-and-run Ordinary People type? Does her father also take the Ordinary People route by treating real problems as if they're trivial? Is Kym's sister, Rachel, needlessly but sophisticatedly cruel toward her? What about the other friends and family? There are so many cycling/recycling through.

The sad thing about *Rachel Getting Married* is we're left without a true resolution... I think, maybe. Yes, the couple gets married, but personally I can't see Sidney living too happily or longly with such an intellectual Luftmensch (air person) as Rachel. Give me the messed up, but real if only because of that, Kym. But is there any resolution with Kym? Well, you be the judge. I suppose the writer is leaving us with at least the idea that something clicks inside her during these days back home. But maybe not. If it does, then it's too subtle for me to pick up on for sure.

Perhaps my readers can comment by going to the [Blog](#).

From my perspective, this is a world populated with nice, well-meaning, but fundamentally superficial individuals. The stuff they seem to care about doesn't move me... probably because the stuff they don't seem to care about (the struggle for simple, joyous, nonpretentious life and liberty) does move me. They are so into their heads, they've lost contact with Earth, with the Now. As such, they are poster children for the unconsciousness that afflicts most people's personal lives, as well as the deep unconsciousness—the coercion, the legal aggression—that pounds most people's political lives.

Being around such 'beautiful' people is depressing—even if only in a movie. It's no wonder Kym feels misperceived. That critics like Ebert find solace or encouragement in the diversity of such a world makes me even more depressed. Based on my well-earned personal experience, you meet much more diverse, enlightening, and hopeful, not to mention entertaining, people in jail... and they're real. So bottom line for Rachel Getting Married: good acting, but what for?

Also, come to think of it, did anyone consider getting Kym a shrink?

###

[1] A Mexican soup full of many diverse ingredients.

[2] Fear of Flying (1973)

[3] From my book, The Sacred Nonaggression Principle: the BUP is essentially political tyranny.

2009 July 2

Copyright © Brian Wright | The Coffee Coaster™

Rachel Getting Married | Anne Hathaway | Dysfunctional Families | Marriage