

# Star studded 'Steel Magnolias' filled with fluff, not substance

By Ken Nolan  
Encore Contributor

Like many poorly made films with big stars, *Steel Magnolias*, the star-studded version of the hit play, is sure to be immensely popular at the box office.

The film is about six southern belles and the friendship which keeps them together, and of course, the problems which threaten to tear them apart. The stars in the film are Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton, Olympia Dukakis, Daryl Hannah, and Julia Roberts. One can almost hear ticket stubs tearing.

The relationship surrounding these women seems to revolve around Parton's hair and beauty salon, where the women come to meet and talk and make fun of each other.

The dialogue between the characters is forced, false and surface-based. These women seem to be crammed full of one-liners and other little jokes which do absolutely nothing but tickle the audience.

Unfortunately, the dialogue is such that one never really gets to know these characters, only their lips which constantly spout contrived and burlesque jokes, usually at others' expenses.

Instead of real characters the audience can feel for, we are force-fed caricatures. Daryl Hannah is the quirky and shy religious zealot, Olympia Dukakis is the outspoken rich widow who has something to say about everyone, and Shirley MacLaine is the cooky, crazy old woman with the mangey dog and a bad attitude.

What we end up with is a smattering of colorful and overpowering personalities which are so cut and dry, so one-way-or-the-other that they become not only predictable but quite tiresome.

The director would have been better off hiring cardboard cutouts for the film. These characters may have worked onstage, but in the intimate realm of film they are one-dimensional.

The plot twist in the film is simple yet interesting. Julia Roberts, who plays Sally Field's beautiful diabetic daughter, has lived a life of being protected and cared for by her mother.

Field must deal with letting her daughter become her own person, free from being doted upon, but she finds it hard to accept that Roberts' new husband will do a good job of taking care of her baby. The scenes with Field and Roberts are tense, emotional, and above all, believable.

When Roberts has a seizure, Field is calm and assertive, and one can almost see the history behind these two characters; the years and years of Field taking care of her daughter.

One interesting scene occurs when Roberts has her hair bobbed. When she sees her short hair in the mirror, she doesn't know whether to hate it or like it, and begins to cry.

Her face and attitude alters into that of a five year-old, and Field also regresses, cooing her daughter and telling her her hair looks pretty. These two actresses are the only strong point of the film, and they work extremely well together.

But of course, as soon as this relationship gets interesting, in steps Dolly Parton or Shirley MacLaine with a witty joke which immediately brings the film back to the surface level on which it operates.

The interesting story concerns the relationship between mother and daughter, and yet the audience only gets to see about five minutes of it before another sugary-sweet witticism is thrown onto the screen.

The audience never gets to see what really keeps these women together, never experiences one moment of real friendship. All we get is a bunch of scenes which are predictable and horribly overdone.

These characters are so colorful and zealous that they seem to be living in a world of hyper-reality; an alternate universe where people talk real loud in country accents, swing their arms a lot, and say a lot of gosh-darn goofy things. I'm not sure where this place is, but it's not planet Earth.

It's almost as if "Steel Magnolias" lacks the courage to live up to its real story. The film is so light-hearted and sincere that one cannot find the coarse underside of the story, the interesting part, through all the fluff and pink flowers.



Courtesy Photo

'Steel Magnolias' stars Dolly Parton, Sally Field, Daryl Hannah, Shirley MacLaine, Olympia Dukakis, and Julia Roberts.

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