

ENTERTAINMENT

Daytime TV the target of 'Soapdish'

★★ 1/2
 Soapdish. Playing at Movies 12 at the Gateway Mall. Rated R.



When it comes to making jokes about television programs, one type that seems to get all the ridicule is soap operas.

The genre is ripe for parody. After all, it's rife with overblown plots, unbelievable characterizations and hilariously forced dialogue that never seems to be spoken in real life.

Well, soaps are a topic worthy of parody. But *Soapdish* relies too much on the fact that what it is doing is guaranteed to get laughs instead of working to get some that won't be obvious. It's funny, but not as much as it could have been with a little more effort.

Sally Field plays Celeste, the bitchy, self-obsessed star of the show who has a closet full of Daytime Emmys. She is a hit as far as she and the fans of the show are concerned. As for the rest of the cast, they despise her.

Especially hateful of the aging prima donna, is the vampish Montana Moorehead, played by Cathy Moriarty, who wants to usurp Celeste as the queen of the soaps.

Montana's scheme revolves around seducing the libido-

driven producer of the appropriately title soap, *The Sun Also Sets*, to turn Celeste into a hateful character on the show.

Keeping Celeste's material faithful to what brought her fame in the first place is her best friend, confidante and head writer for the show, Rose Schwartz, played with thankful reserve by Whoopi Goldberg. It is she who keeps the flighty actress from going off the deep end and boosts her ego.

Brought in with the expressed intent to confuse things is Kevin Kline as a has-been actor who used to be on the show and a former lover of Celeste. He's now reduced to playing Willy Loman in a dinner theater to a bunch of geriatrics.

Their interest in the show each night varies directly with the quality of that night's roast beef. Kline is absolutely hilarious with his fed-up attitude at the hand he has been dealt in his career.

If the plot I have described sounds overly confusing, that's because it's supposed to be. The film is structured like a soap and has confusion piled on confusion and held together with a bunch of running around and screaming.

But the plot is secondary to the over-abundant throwaway gags. Every scene of the soap opera ei-

ther has a cheesy fake ocean, complete with little waves incessantly crashing to the imitation turf or svelte topless men with nothing better to do than stand around guarding doorways or equally inconsequential women characters with nothing better to do than to heave their considerable bosoms.

There are some nice gags, such as the director of daytime programming who tells his underlings the two words he likes to hear: peppy and cheap. Or the writing on the soap scraping the bottom of the screenwriting barrel with lines like Maggie (Celeste's character) pleading in a jail cell, "Yes! I'm guilty! Guilty of love in the first degree!"

Screenwriters Robert Harling, who wrote *Steel Magnolias*, and Andrew Bergman (*The Freshman*), do a good job of creating distinct characters and giving almost all of them funny material.

What works most for this film is how much fun all the actors seem to be having and how they manage to draw the audience in with that positive energy. It may not be as smart or self-effacing as it would have the audience believe, but it does supply quite a few laughs, which is all we might want anyway.

By Lucas J. Gutman
 Emerald Contributor

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