

## Rent: Film lacks strong direction

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Maureen" sequence, which launches characters Mark Cohen and his ex-girlfriend's new lover Joanne Jefferson into a dream-like dance number — the scenes are exciting and audience members can't help but bounce their feet along to the tune. When the setting fails, one is left wondering if director Chris Columbus, known most recently for his work on the first two "Harry Potter" films, was even attempting any creativity at all. A darker, more subversive and possibly even unknown director may have better filled the shoes required to make this film really work on screen.

Overall, the subject matter of this film is still as heavy as it was in the late '90s. The outcries have already begun to rise over the content matter of drug use and homosexuality. And the fact that AIDS is as much an issue today as it was when the musical was released makes the subject matter almost disturbingly pertinent. However, the characters in the story toe the line of being outdated, as has the edginess of the bohemian lifestyle. With shabby chic attire and indie film festivals all the rage these days, too many filmgoers will leave "Rent" feeling like they're part of a way of life that, in reality, they will never be able to understand. And it's difficult to deny that the characters, if real and alive today, would likely boycott this film version of their lives as they boycotted the construction of a multimedia corporate office building in the neighborhood in the show.

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## Notaro: Book comprises series of hapless short stories

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Notaro began her career as a columnist for the Arizona Republic, and her columns are what made up her first book, "The Idiot Girls' Action-Adventure Club," which quickly became a New York Times Bestseller. Notaro now resides in Eugene, and her move from Arizona to Lane County is documented in the last chapter of "An Idiot Girl's Christmas" with the hilarious "Happy Holidays from the Asshole Family."

"An Idiot Girl's Christmas" is Notaro's fifth book, following 2002's "The Idiot Girls' Action-Adventure Club," 2003's "An Autobiography of a Fat Bride," 2004's "I Love Everybody (and Other Atrocious Lies)" and last spring's "We Thought You Would Be Prettier." While "An Idiot Girl's Christmas" is not the best Notaro effort to date, it still succeeds in making the reader laugh and hide his or her face in shame from the true-life stories that Notaro tells.

In the book, Notaro makes readers' worst Christmas memories seem like a walk in the park compared to some of her tales, like "Deck the Mall," in which she has to take her octogenarian Nana shopping. Notaro's humor is also abundant in the humorous "The Most Unfun Christmas Party Hostess Ever." The story weaves the tale of Notaro's infamous but accidental Christmas Party-ruining strategy, which involves pills, disguised flirting and the cops. Read it to believe it.

Notaro's writing and witty sense of humor are easy to fall in love with, but she tends to veer off on tangents and repeats herself. But for true Notaro fans, "An Idiot Girl's Christmas," which features 10 new chapters and three previously published tales, fills expectations. It's the perfect complement to curling up on the couch with a cup of cocoa and fuzzy socks when this season gets too out of control.

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