Mather Zickel, Anne Hathaway, Rosemarie DeWitt and Tunde Adebimpe in *Rachel Getting Married*

Wrecking Ball

Family darkness amidst happy-happy joy-joy

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED: Directed by Jonathan Demme. Written by Jenny Lumet. Cinematography, Declan Quinn. Editor, Tim Squyres. Music, Zafer Tawil & Donald Harrison Jr. Starring Anne Hathaway, Rosemarie DeWitt, Bill Irwin, Tunde Adebimpe, Mather Zickel, Anna Deveare Smith, Anisa George and Debra Winger. Sony Pictures Classics, 2008. R. 113 min. ★★★★☆

Rachel Getting Married is so nearly a very good film that I want to be as hard on it as some of its characters are on themselves — and each other. It has a shiny pedigree in director Jonathan Demme and screenwriter Jenny Lumet (daughter of Sidney); it gives Anne Hathaway a chance to chew on something new and relatively dark; and it presents one of the most enviably hip, sweet, entertaining weddings ever filmed. Handheld cameras, extras playing themselves and the constant presence of a gaggle of improvising musicians give the setting — a long weekend at the Connecticut home of the bride — an engaging immediacy and intimacy. But the unfussy look of the film and the delightfully believable interplay between the characters also serve to highlight its main failing: Underlying every bit of tension is a fairly standard story of domestic drama as a result of tragedy.

It's never enough, it seems, to have a family made up of ordinary, flawed people; there must be an event in the past that defines their relationships and allows for a lot of blame to be tossed around. Here, the guilty party is Kym (Hathaway), a recovering addict let out of rehab to attend her sister's wedding. Kym is presented in a few careful strokes: She's clearly and warmly happy to see her father, but she wastes no time reminding the woman in the front seat that she is not Kym's mother, and she's far tarter about the various friends and family that await at home. This back and forth between love and horribly timed, apparently irresistible honesty is the teeter-totter on which Kym sits, veering from reminiscing lovingly with her sister to pushing Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt)'s every button.

Thankfully, *Rachel Getting Married* isn't simply about the troubled sister wrecking the weekend of a bunch of perfect people. Rachel, in her passive-aggressive way, can give as good as she gets; dad Paul (Bill Irwin) tries to let everything slide off his back; mom Abby (Debra Winger), in a scene that nearly throws the film irredeemably off-track, puts on her blinders about the incident in the family's past that's used to explain so much of their present. There's greater interest in the way Rachel and Kym's family interacts with the family of the groom, the quiet, steady Sidney (Tunde Adebimpe, better known in some circles as the singer for TV on the Radio). They repeatedly toast Sidney and his family, welcome them, speak about how pleased they are to be coming together, but the actual conversations are, for the most part, family specific. These people are closed off, wounded, messy; their inability to get beyond each other says much more than their words about blame and favorites and guilt.

Rachel Getting Married isn't simply about the troubled sister wrecking the weekend of a bunch of perfect people.

This is why *Rachel* is almost great: it's layered and complex under that oversimplified family-drama coating. The film *feels* like a wedding, all ups and downs and speeches that drag and awkwardly sweet moments, and there's a casual sense of wholeness to the production that enhances this impression. Demme's guest list for the wedding includes musicians, family members, actors, nonactors, friends, the audience; those constantly playing musicians get on our nerves as much as they do the characters'. In the end, Rachel's wedding is so inclusive, so buoyantly joyous, it pushes back the family darkness to a point, for a while. But it's telling that much of the joy, most of the exuberance, comes from outside the family — excepting a few small moments. The happy ending isn't entirely theirs. Yet. **EW**

Rachel Getting Married *opens Friday, Nov. 7, at the Bijou.*

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