



Paean to Paris

Woody Allen goes time-traveling

MIDNIGHT IN PARIS: Written and directed by Woody Allen. Cinematography, Darius Khondji and Johanne Debas. Editor, Alisa Lepseller. Starring Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams, Michael Sheen, Marion Cotillard, Kurt Fuller, Kathy Bates and Mimi Kennedy. Sony Pictures Classics, 2011. PG-13. 100 minutes.

Both utterly fluffy and dreamily gilded, Woody Allen's paean to Paris is as shiny a trifle as a high-minded romantic comedy could ever hope to be. And there's not anything wrong with that, exactly, except that *Midnight in Paris* feels thin and unfulfilling, even as it floats on a poignant idea about the tangled relationship between art, love and nostalgia.

Owen Wilson is Allen's latest semi-stammering stand-in, playing Gil Pender, a successful American screenwriter on vacation in Paris with his fiancée, Inez (Rachel McAdams), and her unbearable parents, John (Kurt Fuller) and Helen (Mimi Kennedy, so fantastic in 2009's *In the Loop*). Dreamy Gil, who aspires to quit the screenwriting game and become a novelist, wants to walk in the rain and can't decide whether Paris is more beautiful at night or during the day (the film opens with a long, long montage of Paris street scenes, giving you plenty of time to form your own opinion on the matter). As for Inez, she appears to enjoy sniping endlessly at Gil, mocking his dreamy side and generally being a one-dimensional harpy. It's a mystery what McAdams is doing in this thankless role; her only task is to convincingly push Gil away.

When a slightly drunken Gil decides to wander the streets alone, the film takes a nicely understated turn for the magical: An old Peugeot pulls up and whisks Gil into his beloved '20s. Inspiration comes to life

as he meets Ernest Hemingway (Corey Stoll), F. Scott (Tom Hiddleston) and Zelda Fitzgerald (an excellent Alison Pill), Gertrude Stein (Kathy Bates), who helps with his novel, and others, all of whom speak in brief lines that neatly encapsulate up their now-famous characters. A lovely young muse-to-many, Adriana (Marion Cotillard), gets more screen time as the object of Gil's wandering affection, but she too longs for yet another bygone era.

Meanwhile, in the present, everyone is absolutely horrid and it's no wonder Gil would want to get away from all of them — excepting Carla Bruni as a helpful tour guide and young Léa Seydoux as a friendly Cole Porter fan. Gil's time-traveling adventures serve as a chance to rewrite his novel and to relearn that soaking in nostalgia isn't the most satisfying life choice. In fact, it might just be a distraction from the ugly parts of the life you're not entirely living, or from acting on your real dreams.

Midnight in Paris is a romantic comedy that's neither all that romantic nor all that funny, though Fuller, Kennedy and Sheen try to make the most of roles stuffed with more loathing than wit. If you identify with or are charmed by Wilson's Gil, you'll likely think his fantasy endearing; if you kind of wish he was an iota more self-aware, you might find his wish-fulfillment vacation a little hard to swallow. But the bittersweet contradiction at the heart of Gil's internal conflict saves things from being just too pat: He can't live in the '20s, but it's his nostalgia, his love for a perfect vision of the past, that wakes him up to the present.

Midnight in Paris continues at the Bijou by popular demand, with most showings selling out. Go early. **EW**

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THE HANGOVER 2 (DIGITAL) R 11:15AM 2:00, 4:45, 7:30, 10:15	X-MEN: FIRST CLASS (DIGITAL) PG-13 12:30, 3:45, 7:00, 10:15

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