



KUMAIL NANJIANI IN THE BIG SICK

THE LONG NAP

A stand-up comedian deals with a girlfriend in a coma in *The Big Sick*

The *Big Sick* is an odd duck. As a romantic comedy, it is neither very romantic nor particularly funny, despite the fact that one of its two main characters, Kumail (Kumail Nanjiani), is a struggling stand-up comic trying to break out of the Chicago club circuit. Aside from a handful of gut-busters, the film's humor is awkward and a bit ill at ease, as though wanting desperately to pause at every moment to ask, "Was that funny?"

Odd also, in that Kumail's romantic interest, Emily (Zoe Kazan), spends about half the movie in a medically induced coma as a team of specialists scrambles to zap the mystery infection spreading through her body.

Kumail, the son of Pakistani-American parents (Anupam Kher and Zenobia Shroff) who are trying to fob him off in a traditional arranged marriage, spends the latter part of the movie realizing he is indeed in love with this unconscious girl, and that it's up to him to defy his parents and do everything he can to win her back.

The Big Sick is produced by Judd Apatow, and it bears the Apatow stamp at every turn: Humor that can be a tad

risqué but always somehow preternaturally pleasant; a kind of pre-millennial realpolitik that combines irony and smarts with a straining to burst the bonds of its own chronic adolescence; and a combined fear and desire for the traditional comforts of middle-class bourgeois life, preferably of the educated, white, Williamsburg variety.

And yet, the film deviates from the standard Apatow formula, perhaps because the script, co-written by Nanjiani and his girlfriend, Emily V. Gordon, is based on their real-life trials as an interracial couple as well as the mystery illness Gordon suffered early in their relationship.

The first half of *The Big Sick* is clunky and meandering, in ways good and bad. The pacing is lackadaisical though not lacking in a certain ambulatory charm, especially in the scenes between Kumail and his family, who exerts undue pressure on the young man to maintain traditional Muslim ways. The budding if somewhat half-hearted romance between Kumail and Emily is more sweet and silly than sexy and passionate; both of them are almost unbearably cute as they fumble toward connection. Two excessively pleasant and eagerly agreeable people rarely generate heat on screen.

The film doesn't really take off until Emily's parents, played by Holly Hunter and Ray Romano, show up at the hospital to oversee her care. As the fiercely protective mother, Hunter righteously shuns Kumail for breaking her daughter's heart; Romano, a bit more forgiving (or, as his

wife would have it, cowardly), strikes up a reluctant friendship with Kumail, and the scenes between these two are among the film's funniest, and most moving.

Romano has the shaggy, stumbly, mildly snide man-act down pat, but here he adds a vulnerable warmth to it that reveals unexpected depths to his acting skills; he is completely believable as a husband and father reeling from one big mistake (just guess what that is ...) that haunts him to the point of paralysis. And Hunter has always been one of my favorite actors; here she's at once hilarious, endearing and rather scary, as a woman whose gargantuan sense of self is at once her greatest strength and greatest obstacle. She and Romano practically steal the film from the leads.

Despite the dire circumstances that compel the plot — girlfriend in a coma, impending career suicide, permanent exile from one's family — nothing much seems at stake in *The Big Sick*. The movie generates a kind of mild-mannered tension that has less to do with matters of life and death and more with how an unlikely group of people deals with those matters.

In this sense, *The Big Sick* works fairly well, as a pretty funny, sorta romantic film about generally good people trying to deal with a really shitty situation. It doesn't quite fulfill the promise of its conceit, and to its credit, it doesn't seem that interested in doing so. It seems content to be an intelligent, warmly fuzzy romantic comedy that shuns the requirements of its given genre. (*Bijou Art Cinemas*) ■

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NY Times Critics' Pick
Within Brooklyn's ultra-orthodox Jewish community, a widower battles for custody of his son. A tender drama performed entirely in Yiddish (with English subtitles), the film intimately explores the nature of faith and the price of parenthood. 97% RT.
2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00

THE BIG SICK (R) FINAL WEEK!
Pakistan-born comedian Kumail Nanjiani and grad student Emily Gardner fall in love but struggle as their cultures clash. When Emily contracts a mysterious illness, Kumail finds himself forced to face her feisty parents, his family's expectations, and his true feelings. 98% RT.
1:45, 6:15

STEP (PG) FINAL WEEK!
The senior year of a girls' high school step team in inner-city Baltimore is documented, as they try to become the first in their families to attend college. The girls strive to make their dancing a success against the backdrop of social unrest. 97% RT.
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THE MIDWIFE (SAGE FEMME)
FRI-TUE 12:10 5:00
WED-THU 12:10

LANDLINE
FRI-TUE 2:45 7:35 9:35
WED-THU 5:00

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ALL SAINTS (DIGITAL) (PG)
11:00AM 1:45PM 4:30PM 7:15PM 10:00PM

ANNABELLE: CREATION (DIGITAL) (R)
11:05AM 1:55PM 4:50PM 7:45PM 10:30PM

ATOMIC BLONDE (DIGITAL) (R)
10:15AM 4:10PM 10:25PM

BABY DRIVER (DIGITAL) (R)
9:50PM

BIRTH OF THE DRAGON (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
10:55AM 1:25PM 3:50PM 7:00PM 9:40PM

DARK TOWER, THE (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
11:15AM 2:00PM 4:55PM 7:40PM 10:20PM

DESPICABLE ME 3 (DIGITAL) (PG)
12:00PM 2:30PM 5:05PM 7:50PM

DUNKIRK (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
10:40AM 1:35PM 4:40PM 7:30PM 10:15PM

EMOJI MOVIE, THE (DIGITAL) (PG)
10:45AM 1:40PM 4:25PM 6:55PM

GLASS CASTLE, THE (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
1:05PM 7:05PM

HITMAN'S BODYGUARD, THE (DIGITAL) (R)
10:25AM 1:15PM 4:15PM 7:10PM 10:25PM

INGRID GOES WEST (DIGITAL) (R)
10:50AM 1:30PM 4:45PM 7:35PM 10:10PM

LEAP! (DIGITAL) (PG)
11:30AM 1:25PM 3:35PM 7:20PM 9:45PM

LOGAN LUCKY (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
10:20AM 1:10PM 4:05PM 7:00PM 10:00PM

NUT JOB 2: NUTTY BY NATURE (DIGITAL) (PG)
11:10AM 1:50PM 4:20PM

ONLY LIVING BOY IN NEW YORK, THE (DIGITAL) (R)
11:55AM 2:25PM 5:00PM 7:55PM 10:20PM

SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
12:05PM 3:25PM 6:45PM 9:55PM

VALERIAN AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLAN (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
6:50PM 10:05PM

WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
10:15PM

WIND RIVER (DIGITAL) (R)
10:35AM 1:20PM 4:35PM 7:25PM 10:10PM

WONDER WOMAN (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
11:50AM 3:15PM 6:40PM 10:05PM

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