

Film: The Five-Year Engagement



By Kam Williams
Special to *The Skanner News*

This underwhelming sitcom has been heavily promoted as “From the producer of ‘Bridesmaids,’” as if to imply that Judd Apatow has a golden touch that ensures the success of any movie project he’s blessed. However, the undisputed King of Crude has been associated with just about as many flops (ala ‘Wanderlust’ and ‘Year One’) as hits (like ‘Superbad’ and ‘Knocked Up’).

Unfortunately, ‘The Five-Year Engagement’ fits more in the former category than the latter. Remember how the hilarious Bridesmaids kept you howling from beginning to end in spite of yourself? Well, don’t expect to laugh out loud even once while watching this relatively-funereal, two-hour endurance test.

Yes, the film does certainly trade in all of the anticipated Apatow staples, if that sophomoric brand of humor suits your taste. There’s the gratuitous male nudity, the coarse jokes with profanity serving as punch lines (“Suck my bleeping bleep!”), and such suggestive sight gags as a character simulating sex by gyrating his hips behind a carrot dipped in whipped cream. Much of this comic relief arrives courtesy of an ethnically-diverse support team comprised of an Asian (Randall Park), an East Indian (Mindy Kaling) and an African-American (Kevin Hart).

‘Can this relationship be saved?’ may be the burning question

Besides the skits falling flat, the tortoise-paced picture has bigger problems in an abysmal script and romantic leads with no screen chemistry. The oil-and-water casting of loose cannon Jason Segel opposite prim-and-proper Emily Blunt has disaster written all over it.

His Tom Solomon’s a sous-chef who dreams of opening a restaurant in San Francisco, while her Violet Barnes is a recent Ph.D. with hopes of landing a teaching position at Berkeley in Psychology. Just past the opening credits, she accepts his marriage proposal and puts on the ring, although they both agree that it might be wise to delay tying the knot until their careers have had a chance to blossom. That decision doesn’t sit well with their aging relatives, but at least it means they won’t have to decide right away whether to be married by a minister or a rabbi.

As time passes, the protagonists find additional excuses to postpone the nuptials, like when her sister Suzie (Alison Brie) is left pregnant after a one-night stand with his best friend, Alex (Chris Pratt). Eventually, Violet and Tom drift so far apart that it’s not much of a surprise when she sleeps with the head of her department (Rhys Ifans) or when he’s seduced behind the salad bar by a cute, young co-worker (Dakota Johnson).

“Can this relationship be saved?” may be the burning question. But don’t expect to care when you’ve never really been asked to invest emotionally in such an unsympathetic pair of hesitant hedonists.

Make it stop!

Fair (1 star)
Rated R for sexuality, nudity, coarse humor and pervasive profanity.

Running time: 124 minutes

Distributor: Universal Pictures

Film Review: Restless City

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When Djbril (Sy Alassane) left his native Senegal for the U.S., he harbored high hopes of making it as a musician. But while pursuing his version of the elusive American Dream, the 21 year-old immigrant pays the rent by hustling bootlegged CDs and other assorted contraband on the street of lower Manhattan.

Afterhours, he retreats via moped to a rough side of Harlem where the struggle for survival only intensifies. Uptown, Djbril’s Achilles heel is exposed when he takes an interest in pretty Trini (Sky Grey), the proverbial prostitute with a heart of gold.

The knight in shining armor helps the wayward woman find a legitimate line of work as a hairdresser. Unfortunately, losing a productive ‘ho doesn’t sit well with her pimp, Bekay (Tony Okungbowa). Complicating matters is the fact that the exploitative creep also happens to be Djbril’s boss, which means it’s merely a matter of time before the situation triangulates into an ugly confrontation over the fetching femme fatale.



That, in a nutshell is the perilous plotline of *Restless City*, a super-realistic, slice-of-life saga marking the directorial debut of Andrew Dosunmu. The Nigeria-born filmmaker is already well-known for his award-

winning music video work with such icons as Common, Wyclef Jean, Maxwell, Tracy Chapman, Aaron Neville and the

community comprised primarily of African expatriates. Though sabotaged at times by mood-setting pauses and some stilted dialogue, *Restless City* is still sufficiently engaging to remain recommended for devotees of unsanitized dramatic fare bordering on cinema verite.

Forget pimps, it’s apparently just as hard out there for a street peddler.

Very Good (2.5 stars)
Rated R for drug use and brief sexuality.

In English, French, Wolof and Yoruba with subtitles.

Running time: 80 minutes
Distributor: AFFRM

Harlem Provides Backdrop for Gritty Survival Saga

late Isaac Hayes. Here, he makes a promising foray into full-length features via a visually-captivating adventure which offers a penetrating peek inside a vibrant

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Cheryl Brown in *Black Pearl*
Photo by Patrick Woodcock

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