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Movies

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'Happiness' is troubling

DEBORAH NICOL - DESERT POST WEEKLY • AUGUST 2, 2007

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If the Devil wants to buy your soul, for the love of God, don't exchange it for a movie like "Shortcut to Happiness."



Too bad this flick did not have a shortcut to the end. Better suited as an afternoon cable movie, it quickly becomes an embarrassing misuse of a comedic cast.

Perhaps the many Saturday Night Live alums (Dan Aykroyd, Amy Poehler, Darrell Hammond) thought this would provide a door to more dramatic parts; perhaps they were just paying off a personal debt to director (and frequent SNL guest) Alec Baldwin.

A well-intentioned plot finds Daniel Webster (Anthony Hopkins) as a modern day publisher. Baldwin portrays desperate writer Jabez Stone on the verge of recognition but teetering from years of being shot down and the resulting desperately miniscule bank account. In a fit of jealousy, Stone cries out that he would sell his soul to become as equally accomplished, and the rest is history.

Jennifer Love Hewitt portrays the lady in red (minus the tail, which hangs in Webster's office), and delivers cruelty and seduction in her usual over the top manner. Rather than signing in blood, Stone sleeps with the devil, and from then on becomes easily seduced into questionable behavior by any woman with ample curves.

Baldwin does his best to bring humanity to his character, but the film just falls flat. However, he looks pretty good in the role and the whole production could pass as being filmed 10 years prior. Interestingly, it is credited as being first released at a festival in 2004 and rumored to have been completed in 2001.

As the acting is otherwise fine (with the exception of Hewitt), problems point to lousy editing. Bluntly stated, it is often cheesy and utilizes tricks from technology not seen for decades. Screens fade to black unnecessarily or become swallowed into a circle or slid across into the next scene. The music feels as if it was pulled randomly from made-for-TV movies and does not always fit the mood.

The film tries to be overly complex with a simple premise. Stone's unpublished shot at glory is displayed as a sepia-toned period piece, which was melded from Stone's words typed across the Manhattan landscape, who was introduced by Webster's voiceover. Webster will occasionally interject a narration, which feels unnecessary.

Webster and Stone's connection feels too loose for Webster to risk his soul defending him, and the whole story within a story loop drags out an already plodding tale. The premise that success does not mean happiness is tired (his best-selling book is titled "Loss of Feeling") and being critical of a mindless media following is well worn. If the audience learns nothing else from this film, it is that sometimes after six years on the shelf, a movie should should stay on the shelf.

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Yari Film Group Releasing

Scene from 'Shortcut to Happiness'

'SHORTCUT TO HAPPINESS'

Rated: PG-13 for language and sexual content.

Time: 1 hour, 45 minutes

Genre: Drama

Language: English

Starring: Alec Baldwin, Anthony Hopkins, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Dan Aykroyd, Kim Cattrall.

Director: Alec Baldwin

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