



THE MERRY GENTLEMAN

USA | 2008 | 99m | 15

Director: Michael Keaton

Producer: Steven A Jones

Screenplay: Ron Lazzeretti

Cinematography: Chris Seager

Editing: Grant Myers

Original Music: Jon Sadoff

Leading Players: Michael Keaton, Kelly Macdonald, Tom Bastounes

A man with a secret - a woman with a past, reads the tagline, and effectively sums up the two lead characters functions in this film. Set in the Christmas period, the ironically titled *The Merry Gentlemen* may have you believe this will be a jolly seasonable movie. However, the characters Frank (Keaton) and Kate (Macdonald) are far from happy. Kate has moved to Chicago having just run from her abusive husband, while Frank is unhappy in his career as a hit-man, constantly pondering suicide atop walls and roofs. The two interact briefly in the beginning, Kate spotting him from afar on a roof, after he stages a hit in her building to look like a suicide. She screams out in horror only to confuse him enough to flee the scene. After a chance encounter later in which Frank helps Kate carry a Christmas tree into her apartment, the two, amidst several convincing plot twists, develop a platonic friendship that carries the narrative forward.

Having played a Chicago citizen with terminal kidney cancer in *My Life*, Keaton (making his directorial debut with this film) returns to this familiar setting as a job hating man with more of an internal emotional illness than a physical disease. It's never an easy feat to both star in and direct a film, but he does so with an ease that is enviable. Another two role player in the film is Executive Producer, Tom Bastounes. He plays the cop who interviews Kate about the events she saw on the roof that day. Uncomfortably for her, he develops a personal interest in her, adding a supporting edge to what could have become a stale plot.

Although the plot focuses on both characters, you find it begins to turn more in Kate's favour, with Kelly Macdonald lighting up the screen and giving an empathetic performance. Frank, on the other hand, is an internally wounded individual whose introspective character is drawn to the fragile, emotionally broken Kate, who lies constantly about her past, fearing its discovery. The script



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excellent A

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B

fair C

D

poor E

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says so little of Frank and his issues though, that it's difficult on occasion to know how Kate would identify with him. Keaton however, pulls it off making you both pity and fear the character, while maintaining his enigmatic feel.

Keaton's part being devoid of dialogue means Macdonald carries the film for the most part, and does so with grace and ease. Having had early success in the likes of *Trainspotting* and *Stella Does Tricks*, she retains her natural Scottish accent further personifying the idea of Kate's self-imposed isolation, being a long way from home. Like much of her earlier work, Macdonald delivers the part with subtlety, and enough expression for you to know exactly what she is thinking - a trait that is difficult to come by in talent nowadays.

Misery loves company, as the saying goes, and certainly seems to be an opinion shared by writer Ron Lazeretti. The film is not so much about action, but more reaction. Keaton shows an eye for letting the action unfold, without over direction with the drama moving at a relaxed pace. One of the tensest scenes is between Kate and her spouse played by the often overlooked Bobby Cannavale leaving you effectively hating this abusive character and feeling for Kate.

While *The Merry Gentlemen* may not suit a younger audience, it maintains an edge that stops it being displeasingly predictable and comes to a somewhat surprising climax.

BFF Film Note by Amy Lawson

Tomorrow at Bath Film Festival 2009...

Thursday 19 November, 6.30pm | Little Theatre | £7 / £5

Mid-August Lunch (Pranzo di ferragosto)

Italy | 2008 | 75m | U | sub-titles

Giovanni is skint, but does well to survive, as well as looking after his mum as only an Italian son would do. When it becomes both necessary and desirable that he should temporarily absorb three more ladies into his entourage, he does so with a combination of grace and reluctance. It's short sweet and thoroughly delightful.

Thursday 19 November, 8.50pm | Chapel Arts | £6 / £4

The Sky Crawlers

Mamoru Oshii | Japan | 122m | 15tbc

In this nightmarish world, war is a media contrivance played out between gigantic corporations to reassure the populace that things are being taken care of. The meditative, dystopian worldview of Mamoru "Ghost In The Shell" Oshii's latest anime is balanced by stunning aerial action sequences and a muted but striking beauty.

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