

Dinner for Schmucks

A Review by Tom Sims, Executive Director for Cape May Film Society

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What does it take to be funny? The right situation, precise comedic timing, flawless acting? Sure all of these, but something more. How about the “mob mentality?” Nothing makes you laugh more at a movie than a hundred people or so joining you. In “Dinner for Schmucks,” starring Steve Carell and Paul Rudd, having an audience “laughing with you” definitely helps.

“Dinner for Schmucks” is a remake of a reportedly better executed French film called “The Dinner Game.” Tim (played by Rudd) is an upwardly mobile executive who is invited to a special dinner whereby participants bring... well, bring an idiot. The goal is to win the prize for bringing the biggest idiot. Essentially, this is what will catapult Tim to the “seventh floor” an envious spot to all his sixth floor colleagues. Tim’s girlfriend, Julie (beautifully played by Stephanie Szostak) does not like the idea at all, and Tim assures her he’s not going to participate. But he does. Especially since he just happens to (literally) run into Barry (played by Carell), a taxidermist who creates 3D vignettes using dead mice.

Clearly what is not always necessary to be funny is a tightly crafted storyline and strong character development as both are woefully lacking. The story unfolds clumsily to say the least as I found myself rolling my eyes at the blatant disregard for quality storytelling. About two thirds into the film, when it became apparent they were actually going to have a “dinner” scene I rolled my eyes again and whined, “They’re going to make me sit through a dinner scene?”

Carell and Rudd do what they always do in this film--Carell the idiot and Rudd the straight guy, but it’s the great support cast that actually makes the film watchable. Zach Galifianakis plays Therman, Carell’s boss at the IRS who uses mind control techniques to manipulate people. Jermaine Clement plays Kieran, an artist who is managed by Rudd’s girlfriend; his extreme art and lifestyle get big laughs.

And just when the film shows the slightest indication that it will rise above its own silliness to become (oh, I don’t know... dare I say) poignant, it reverts right back to just trying to make you laugh at whatever expense necessary. The problem is, in a theater with an audience that laughs with you, it actually is pretty funny! Renters beware! If you wait for DVD and watch this alone in your house, don’t expect to get the laughs I’m talking about here. Maybe we’ll screen the French version of this film here in town. Let us know what you think by emailing capemayfilm@hotmail.com .