

Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides

By Tom Sims, Executive Director, Cape May Film Society
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With so many sequels out there on films where I haven't even had the desire to see the original (Kung Fu Panda? Really?), I was about to boycott all summer sequels. But I had to see Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides. When the first pirates came out in 2003, it was love at first "arrrrrgh!" Depp was one of the most endearing pirates ever as Jack Sparrow, and Geoffrey Rush was remarkable as Captain Barbossa. To say it is one of my favorite pirate movies is an understatement. So when they produced a sequel a few years later, I was excited--then terribly disappointed. The second installment and for that matter, the third one which was released just one year later were scattered at best, stretching for a story that just wasn't understandable or engaging. Terrible.

Now there's Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides. The premise is simple--Barbossa (now in service to the King of England) and Jack Sparrow are in search of the Fountain of Youth. How to drink from the Fountain is not so simple--and in that is where this film is redeemed. It would seem that the producers of Pirates have decided to pull back, regroup, and keep the plot less complicated yet with the same simple twists that made the first film so enjoyable. Add to the mix Ian McShane, who masterfully plays the legendary Blackbeard, and you've got the makings of an installment finally worth (although not fully comparable to) the original. Penelope Cruz is also new to the series, there isn't the same chemistry between her and Depp as with former lead actress Kiera Knightley (who said that the franchise was exciting at the time but behind her now).

The whole Fountain of Youth scenario seems a little played out, and I wasn't impressed with the first half of the film in all of its chase scenes (in so far as you can have chase scenes with horses and carriages), and even the swashbuckling seemed tired. But the mermaid scene engages you, and the film truly picks up in the second half until you actually want to see all the components come together in the end. And integral to the plot is the concept of mermaid's tears, reminding me of the short film we did with Teitelman students and Gail Schmidtchen a few years back. Gail is returning for this year's film camp June 27 through July 1; find out more at www.capemayfilm.org or call 609-884-6700.

Final note: I saw about 30 minutes of the Hangover 2--horrible. I triple dog dare anyone to write up a review highlighting any redeeming qualities of the movie beyond "it made me laugh." Email: capemayfilm@hotmail.com.