

Arts & Entertainment

POPCORN™



The Holiday: A Minor Celebration

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent
By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 & 1/2 popcorns

Writer-director Nancy Meyers, purveyor of million dollar heartbreaks and bargain basement resolutions, once again weaves instant gratification of the romantic kind. Though, truth be told, *The Holiday* doesn't quite pull the heartstrings as instantly as we'd like.

Ever a generous caterer to the war between the sexes, Meyers tosses a veritable buffet of philosophy onto the screen for us to gorge. As with most smorgasbords, we are left to separate the fodder from the gourmet.

Nonetheless, the robust feeling of goodwill and hope permeating this comedy of two lovelorn women who exchange homes, ostensibly to flee the unappreciative men in their lives, engages the hopeless romantic in us like carbohydrates soothe the foodie. Aw, just another scene won't hurt.

There is, in spite of everything, something to be said for the bright and shiny faces that help give this indulgence that "What's not to like?" appeal.

Cameron Diaz is Amanda, successful producer of movie trailers, unprofitably living with a lothario. The manse from whence she ejects the cad looks to be either in Bel Air or Hollywood.

Less well healed but equally betrayed is Kate Winslet's Iris, a newspaper editor. Her Dickensian cottage in Surrey, U.K., is more charming than sprawling. Her guy, an up-and-coming author at the paper, claims he needs her. Asterisk, he's just announced his engagement to another woman. Men!

Making matters worse, Christmas cometh. But aha, when the sorry souls happen upon each other's plight through the modern convenience of the Internet, the old-fashioned custom of going abroad following estrangement is mutually mulled.

They'll switch abodes, and maybe karmas. Oh, c'mon, it's supposed to be silly.

But before getting on to the hope springs eternal stuff, filmmaker Meyers must rattle off the usual city mouse-country mouse clichés. Iris is wowed by the sheer glamour of her counterpart's California digs, and even meets a legendary Hollywood great portrayed by Eli Wallach. Amanda, in rented car, almost kills herself driving on the left.

However, having survived that, she wastes no time in quite unexpectedly substantiating the myth that Americans don't much stand on ceremony in matters of the, uh, heart.

That is, when Iris's friend Graham (Jude Law) visits on the misassumption that his Platonic pal is still at home, it seems he has serendipitously landed in the right place.

Ms. Diaz does a ditsy but nice contemporization of the well-scrubbed, conflicted coquette Doris Day so delightfully created in the so-called stifled 50s. But whereas Ms. Day's character waited until nearly the end of the film to prove her virtue, Amanda rejects the process right from the get-go. My, aren't we modern?

Well, perhaps. It seems Amanda and Graham have merely shuffled around the elements that go into a relationship. Afterwards, when Graham isn't quite as accessible as Amanda might like, she suspects something. How modern is that?

Meanwhile, back in the sunny climes of California, Iris is too busy establishing the film's subtext to find her new love. Rather, the angelic sort has taken to getting neighbor Arthur Abbott out of his shell.

The writer's guild wants to fete the scribe. But Mr. Wallach's warmly played octogenarian, relegated to using a walker, is too self-conscious to accept. Iris perseveres. In return, she learns from the Oscar-winning screenwriter that there's the lead and there's the best friend. You, he assures, are a leading lady. So stop falling for the bad boy.

Now, according to the Fairness Doctrine implied in all romantic comedies, Iris must be rewarded for her humanitarianism. Thus, Jack Black as film score composer Miles enters stage left. Usually the zany loose cannon, inevitably with a dubious mission in mind, here Black is uncharacteristically normal. And therein lies the rub.

Practically everyone from the principals to the dirty rats who have done them wrong is terribly attractive. While the slightly chubby Mr. Black appears to have all thirty-two teeth, a reasonably good head of hair and has doubtlessly showered within the week, he's hardly actor enough to get lost in this crowd.

But then, that's the least of the movie's sins. After all, this is the genre of dispensation. You either buy into the fantasy or not. Hence, if opting to enjoy its guilty pleasures, just be sure to get into the spirit of *The Holiday*.

The Holiday, rated PG-13, is a Sony Pictures Entertainment release directed by Nancy Meyers and stars Cameron Diaz, Kate Winslet and Jude Law. Running time: 138 minutes



BREAK A LEG...The Holy Trinity Drama Club gave its fall performance on Saturday, November 18. The drama workshop was comprised of 21 students from grades 2 through 5 under the direction of Paul O'Connor and two assistants. All of the children took part in the presentation that consisted of eight small skits. Pictured, from left to right, are: Peter Hunziker, Celia Grassi, Alyssa Lopez, Madeline Pikus, Elizabeth Massa, Sarah Davidson, Ashley Smith, Ryan Kelly, Elaine Arida and Mitchell Kelly. Mr. O'Connor is standing in front.

VACNJ Offers Holiday Art Sampler on December 16

SUMMIT - The Visual Arts Center of New Jersey is hosting a Holiday Art Sampler on Saturday, December 16, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the arts center, located at 68 Elm Street in Summit.

The public is invited to participate in the more than 15 free art demonstrations and hands-on art activities and workshops for children, teens and adults that will be offered in all mediums throughout the day.

While in the building, the public can experience the innovative First Look - Spotlight on Emerging Sculptors exhibition in the Main Gallery, explore the newly renovated and expanded arts center, enjoy snacks and drinks and register for the many winter classes and workshops that the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey is offering beginning in January.

Visitors can also stop by the Holiday Boutique which features handmade jewelry, glass, pottery, weavings, stationery and other objets d'art. A percentage of each purchase goes to support the arts center's education scholarships.

Ample parking is available in the art center's lot. For more information, contact Dannielle Mick, education director, Vanessa Chippendale, education assistant, or Noelle Tate, outreach education coordinator, at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, at (908) 273-9121, or artcenter.nj.org.

WHS Graduate Completes Self-Titled Debut Album

WESTFIELD - In 2005, Steven Lintz, a 1998 Westfield High School (WHS) graduate, and his band Blackline moved to Los Angeles. The band completed their self-titled debut album this past summer. Information on the band is available on blacklinerock.com and individual songs can be downloaded from iTunes. The song "Run" has been downloaded more than 10,000 times.

Mr. Lintz now goes professionally by the name "Steven Slate." He also recently opened a new state-of-the-art recording studio, Slate Studios, in the Laurel Canyon hills. Steven produces albums for other bands, and records, mixes and masters in a wide range of musical styles at Slate Studios. The studio's website is slatestudios.com.

Mr. Lintz's love for music started when he played the saxophone in the school band at Franklin Elementary School. When he was in seventh grade, he started taking guitar lessons from WHS graduate Jake Schwartz. Within six months he also picked up the drums and bass guitar, and began writing and recording his own music, playing all the instruments himself.

While at Northeastern University he started his band, Blackline. Most

of the music they perform was written and arranged by Mr. Lintz, and many of the songs were composed while he was still living in Westfield. Mr. Lintz is the lead singer and plays guitar in several of the recordings.

Blackline has been playing this year in the Los Angeles area, including on the famed Sunset Strip at the Viper Room, The Whisky A-Go-Go, the Cat Club and The Knitting Factory in Hollywood.

In addition, Blackline songs have been played on FM and Satellite radio stations, and have been featured in a number of extreme sports DVDs, including Big Sky's Extreme Thunderstruck IV and Extreme Velocity's Mountains of Mud. Finally, Blackline recently shot a music video for their song, "Armageddon Soul," which is in the editing stages now.

Crave Magazine Review said, "Blackline - Remember the name. I think you'll read and hear it again...From start to finish, this is a truly enjoyable listen - every track."

Mr. Lintz looks forward to returning to the east coast to perform with his band in the future. He appreciates feedback on his music at steve@blacklinerock.com.

Silk Screen Artist Merkl

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Arts Center of N.J. and the Millburn-Short Hills Arts Center.

Ms. Merkl's art has been widely exhibited. "In 35 years, I have exhibited in over 1,000 shows around the United States and in Canada, England, Spain, Korea, Australia, Japan and Bangladesh," she explained.

Her work has earned her national and international recognition, and she is the recipient of more than 250 professional awards. She recently was awarded an "Honorable Mention in Graphics" at the Miniature Painters, Sculptors and Gravers Society of Washington, D.C.'s International Juried Miniature Art Show, which runs through January of 2007 at the Strathmore Mansion Museum in Virginia.

Lifeguarding Course Slated This Month

BERKELEY HEIGHTS - The Berkeley Aquatic Club will present an American Red Cross Lifeguarding course Tuesday through Friday, December 26, 27, 28 and 29. All candidates must be 15 years old by December 29, 2006. The course will include certifications in CPR, First Aid and Lifeguarding.

The cost is \$290 and includes all books, materials and pool time. Class size is limited. For more information, schedules, dates and times, please access www.berkeleyaquatic.org or call the aquatic office at (908) 464-1995.

Baptist Church Posts Christmas Services

AREA - The Union County Baptist Church will hold a Christmas Candlelight service on Wednesday, December 20, at 7 p.m. Participants will sing carols, hear testimonies, pray and listen to a sermon. All are welcome.

On Sunday, December 24, a Christmas service will take place at 10:45 a.m. with a program featuring a chance to sing Christmas carols and hear special music. Additionally, children and teenagers will present their holiday program. The church is located at 4 Valley Road in Clark on the Clark circle.



RASCALLY RABBIT...Park naturalist Sue Day introduces a rabbit to participants in Trailside Nature and Science Center's "Toddler Time" workshop on December 7 entitled "Bunny Bundles for Winter" for adults with children less than three years of age. The children enjoyed hopping and leaping like a bunny while learning interesting facts about cottontail rabbits of the Watchung Reservation. Pictured clockwise from Ms. Day are Luke Pitts of Cranford, David and Jonathon Kearns of Kenilworth, Ben Root of Westfield, Nora Mehler of Gillette and Marissa Burton of Scotch Plains. Trailside Nature and Science Center is located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainside and is a service of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders. For information on upcoming winter programs, workshops and special events at Trailside, call (908) 789-3670 or visit ucnj.org/trailside.

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