

Sugar, with a side of serious

National Post Published: Friday, May 25, 2007

Filmmaking is a collaborative art, so why isn't film reviewing? Each week in this space, experts, artists and plain paying movie customers come together to take apart a recent release. It's salty. It's full of hot air. It's the Popcorn Panel.

This week's panel - Jodie Katz, Toronto-based event planner
(www.thesocialbutterfly.ca) - Craig Courtice, a short filmmaker who isn't very tall
- Laura Koot, National Post news Presentation Editor

This week's Film Waitress

Jodie Ah the waitress! A blanket "title" used for one who arrives at your table to take your food order, which, like the iceberg, is only one-eighth of the real deal; the true meat and potatoes lies beneath the surface (I sense many food-related examples are forthcoming in my blurbs, I'm afraid). Before I delve into the movie's boon or bust moments I should just mention that as a former member of this establishment, I was always referred to as a "server," which in this context would be a whole different movie altogether ...

Craig I waited once for three months. Burned my finger on a fajita plate (but managed to suck up the pain and deliver the goods to my table) and never seriously thought about doing it again. But durnit, someone's got to get the food to the table. And serving ought to be a more noble profession. Like tailoring and such. But it seems few young'uns see the value in it. Most are just distracted wannabe actors who don't seem to understand that the size of a tip corresponds with the length of their attention span.

Now, I know you think I'm going tangential on ya but I promise there's a metaphor in there somewhere about this mixed-upsweet- lil'-Flintrubblebubble-pie of a movie.

Laura That's the thing that got me about Waitress. I was struck by the charm and nostalgia. I served my time at Donut Delight and had my share of customers with

unbelievable idiosyncrasies. Also, pie is my unchallenged favourite food. I got my first job in journalism because the hiring editor especially enjoyed a feature I wrote about the duelling camps of homemade pie crust vs. pre-made. And Andy Griffiths and I go way back. We spent many a Sunday night together, he as Matlock, me as the teenager boiling a hot dog to eat along with my television hero -- his hallmark in every episode. I was completely seduced by the simplicity of the story and its delightful telling.

Jodie Enough about our own trays full of angst and on to that of the movie's. Somewhere between the writers of Mel's Diner (mouthy waitress a la Flo), the casting directors of Pee Wee's Playhouse (creepy elfin love interest) and the set designers of Easy Rider by way of Our Town (is it gritty? It is pretty? And where did surly Early get that very retro dining room floor lamp, EQ3?), you have yourself a very sweet though strange little film.

I can't decide if I loved the simplicity of the script, which read like a play, or hated the obvious directorial notes (cue curmudgeon who looks a lot like Matlock. He lowers his newspaper to deliver anecdotes about the zodiac thinly veiled as life lessons). I gotta be honest, though, I did cry at least seven times, but that could just be PMS. Also, I think that Keri Russell has just one character that she can play: stunned and mopey. And yet, I didn't totally mind it like I did in season three of Felicity when all you wanted her to do was get some cojones and sleep with the female art history professor instead of pining for Scott Speedman! This ain't no deep dish, but to quote American Idol judge Randy Jackson, "It was a'ight."