

RAIN MAN

SKREEN ★ ★ SKREEN

If there is one formula which, when proficiently executed, can almost guarantee box office success, it is the odd couple approach. Take two characters that are either socially, financially or intellectually opposed to the point of being diametric, take 'em on a journey somewhere and WHAMMO! A plot is born. Of course, if you sprinkle in a bit of heart warming enlightenment, the aspiring filmmaker can't possibly go wrong. Here then is Rain Man - the latest in what appears to be a continuing trend of encounter group as motion picture art, otherwise known as the fish-out-of-water-buddy-buddy-road movie. Sounds like I'm going to point Cliche' all over the review doesn't it? But I won't. It works.

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Before you even see the beast, the cinema goer has inevitably become a veritable cornucopia of facts concerning the various attributes of *Rain Man*. Most notable of these is the trumpeting that, of course, self-confessed method actor Dustin Hoffman has spent several thousand hours monitoring the habits and idiosyncrasies of autistic people and their families. Dustin, you see, plays the part of the "idiot savant" and recently discovered brother of Charlie Babbitt who sells flash Italian cars in L.A. Before we really get into the meat of the picture I'd just like to ask "Yo Dusty - is it really necessary?" The almost approaching physically perfect Tom Cruise is chosen to play the part of the cold and self-centered sibling of Hoffman's creation and the twist, as you well know by now, is that the Babbitt's bastard of a father has left about 3 million smackers to the estate of the older brother, currently residing at an institution for the mentally infirm, half way across the continent. The long and short of it is that Charley sneaks Raymonde out of the asylum such that legal proceedings can be undertaken in

his home town. Gradually the icy and supercilious Charley warms to the fact that Ray is a human being and more importantly, his last flesh and blood relation (*stop yawning at the back there!*)

At first we fear the worst, being subjected to a shallow series of scenes between Cruise and Golino. Further, Director Barry Levinson (*Good Morning Vietnam*) looks immediately poised to launch us into the dreadful promo-video-as-cinema mentality that is currently *de vogue* amongst the lightweights of the profession (we even get to see that blasted field full of wind generators again that pops up in films as often as a SUB cafeteria cheeseburger does in the washrooms.)

However, as soon as Hoffman appears on the screen as the delightful Raymond, the whole opus blossoms into a thing of great substance in all aspects of the cinematic art.

I grit my teeth in the initial scenes as the kneejerk liberal that has developed within me over the past eight years of college, prepares to be offended by the audience

giggling inanely at the actions of the (supposedly bona fide) mentally retarded. But, despite all the purported notes and mimicry, Hoffman fails to convince me that he is autistic. He is, however, brilliant. Throughout the character of Raymond, who can instantly figure out the square root of a five figure



"To be quite honest Tom... I have no idea." -- The Babbitt Brothers consider the significance of the huge fly in this weeks 'Meat in a scene unfortunately left out of the motion picture Rain Man.

number and memorize' the entire works of Shakespeare without understanding the significance of either, is that of a cartoon. Raymond is the metaphor of a small gifted child, waiting to be crushed and cajoled like a delicate flower without the slightest comprehension why. His is not this world, it's ways or its inhabitants. His is a world that must be ordered and exact; one in which the slightest disturbance can quite possibly result in utter devastation. Nevertheless, the analogy with a debilitated person was remarkably elusive for me.

Cruise too shows moments of brilliance and Levinson should be applauded for risking the credibility of the film by allowing this young maturing actor to take on such a weighty responsibility. Given what have been essentially flimsy portrayals to fill out in the past, there are moments in *Rain Man* when Cruise is able to complete a nuance or a certain mood perfectly. Despite the contention that such inflated beauty could guarantee box office rockets in the future, I think we can be safely assured of some classic motion picture moments containing Mr. Cruise.

There are instances in *Rain Man* that should have been left on the cutting room floor. Despite the sparkling points, Tommy-boy does rather underact if anything. Every other reviewer under the sun glows with appreciation over the gradual

transition from the hardass to the niceman as the picture progresses. However, it is only in the last ten minutes in the company of lawyers that any tangible character change can be recognized. Even here this is merely a small breach in the otherwise pragmatic and existentialist Charlie Babbitt. If the (transmogrification) deal was intended, then Cruise's manifestation of Babbitt should have been far more remonstrative with his older brother than the softened corners that the dictates of Hollywood allowed us to see. There are points in *Rain Man* when the audience feels that certain emotions are being held in check. It is in these scenes that Cruise is merely pretending rather than acting. The end result dangerously approaches wood.

Furthermore, the reappearance of the girlfriend later in the movie is entirely superfluous save for the opportunity to witness her delightfully perky physique. The

kissing scene is pure schmaltz and needs to be obliterated from the film entirely. This being toward the end of the film, Levinson should have built the burgeoning understanding between the two brothers to a climax. Wedging Golino between them only serves as an irritating impediment.

A classic movie? Well... probably. *Rain Man* is certainly important enough for the viewer to be able to remember with affection the two major characters. This is especially true of that played by Hoffman who sticks to the task unwaveringly, completely cognizant of what is required for HIS character. As I mentioned earlier, I personally could not connect with the concept of Dustin as autistic but this does not detract from the sheer value of a film that flies along with humour and poignancy, aided quite substantially by the ethereal cinematography. Catch it now before the inevitable deluge of Bronze statuettes occurs in March.

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