

December Embers 3

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Dec. 23, 2009 NCR Today

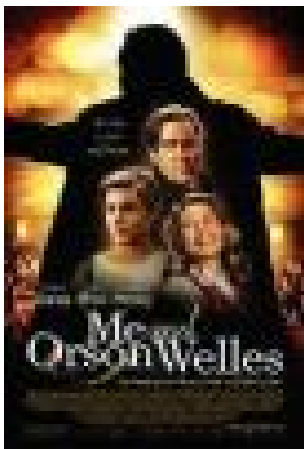
Burning thoughts about new films

These past few weeks has seen the release of several surprisingly good films (though some will receive wide release in January). Here are some of the best:



2012 -- Roland Emmerich, the director who gives us really big apocalyptic-

themed films such as "Independence Day" (1996) and "The Day after Tomorrow" (2004), does it again in "2012." Supposedly based on a prediction of the Mayan calendar, 2012 is to usher in the end of the world (again.) The film gives short-shift to the prophecy in its over-blown special f/x fest, but nevertheless it asks an important question: in bad times is it possible for people to lay down their lives for others? The film switches to Biblical allusions, most notably Noah's Ark and John the Baptist. The film seemed to suggest a natural explanation for the flood that set Noah afloat and that if it happens again it may also have a natural explanation rather than a devastating "Left Behind" interpretation. Yet, only 400,000 can be saved on the arks the world's governments build in China to save themselves. So "2012" is a rather extravagant mess of a film but if disaster movies are your cup of tea, go for it. (When the air craft carrier John F. Kennedy crushes the White House, and salvation comes from China, was that a political statement?) Hmm. By the way, Mimi Leder's 1989 "Deep Impact" did this theme better.



Me and Orson Welles - This story, based on the novel by Robert Kaplow, is from one

of my favorite "hip" directors, Richard Linklater (*Waking Life*). It is set in 1937, when Welles was a known radio actor and before he took the world by storm both on the radio and in movies. "Me and Orson Welles" features a teenager (Zac Efron; *High School Musical*) who is in love with the theater, acting, and writing, everything about it. He manages to get hired for no pay by Orson Welles' company that intends to produce

Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" in a week's time. The film is a kind of sideways examination of the real Orson Welles, played here by a relative newcomer from the UK, Christopher Mackay. He really nails the voice and "the look" of Welles. Orson Welles is depicted as a brilliant life force that uses people, misuses them, and discards them with a flourish and without a backwards glance. If I hadn't been familiar with "Citizen Kane" (1941), "The Magnificent Ambersons" (1942), and "The War of the Worlds" (broadcast October 30, 1938), I would have missed many of the inter-textual references. In fact, you may find some that eluded me. As a friend said, this is Zac Efron's transitional picture from pop to serious drama but he barely makes it. He sings a song with his "High School Musical" voice during one of the rehearsals; someone should have caught that. Still, I found the film interesting, classy, and am glad I saw it.



An Education -- Nick Hornby is a very entertaining novelist who can turn his

books into enjoyable screenplays. Recall "About a Boy" (2002) and "Fever Pitch" (2005). But here the mostly male perspective changes as Hornby adapts a coming-of-age memoir by British journalist Lynn Barber into a script that understands the character with empathy. The film is smart with a touch of pathos. Jenny (Carey Mulligan; Bleak House) is about to turn sixteen in the mid-1960s. She is as bright as her parents (Alfred Molina and Cara Seymour) are dull and boring. Her tedious father has her on track for Oxford so she can get a job after and support herself. One rainy day, she accepts a ride home from an older man, David (Peter Saarsgaard.) They meet again and he asks her out. Jenny's father is reluctant, but ever so carefully David seduces Jenny and her parents. David makes them trust him. When Jenny discovers that the sophisticated David and his high class friend Danny are running business scams, she is shocked and threatens to walk away. But she likes the excitement and hates the boredom of her life at home and school. She gives her virginity to David on a weekend trip her parents allow her to take because David's "aunt" (Danny's girlfriend) will be the chaperone. David proposes to her when he thinks Danny is about to make a move on her. Then when Jenny discovers the real truth about David, she must humbly ask for mercy from her parents, teachers whom she had confronted and humiliated when she quit school to be married. I imagine there are many Jenny's out there who learn life's lessons the hard way; the thing is, Jenny is a fast learner and amazingly has not burned all her bridges. She has one lifeline left, a teacher. This film is as much about youth, and growing up as it is about the educational establishment, and both sides score points. This is a well-acted story with warmth, hope and insight. You can feel the cold English rain falling, falling.

All of Sr. Rose's "December Embers" are here:

Part One: [A Christmas Carol, The Last Station and Up in the Air](#) [1]

Part Two: [The Fantastic Mr. Fox, Brothers, The Road](#) [2]

Part Three: [2012, Me and Orson Welles and An Education](#) [3]

Part Four: [Precious: Based on the novel Push by Sapphire, The Blind Side](#) [4]

Movie ratings can be found at Web site of the Motion Picture Association of America (www.mpa.org) and some reviews and ratings can be found at the Office of Film and Broadcast of the U.S. bishops' conference Web site (www.usccb.org).

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