

Death at a Funeral revives dry wit, oddball families

This brand of situational comedy may be new to director Frank Oz, but he crafts one glorious disaster of a funeral

filmreview

Death at a Funeral

Now Playing
Directed by Frank Oz
Starring Matthew Macfadyen, Keely Hawes, Andy Nyman, Ewen Bremner, and Daisy Donovan

SEAN STEELS
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Funerals are always a tough ordeal. Families come together, tears are shed, and kind words are spoken about the departed—if you're lucky, anyway.

There's always the chance that your family is dysfunctional to the point of self-implosion and a few of your guests will mistakenly take a chemical cocktail of mescaline, acid, and whatever other hallucinogens your drug-hoarding, pharmacist-in-training cousin can get his hands on. Such is the plot of *Death at a Funeral*.

It seems like an understatement to say that dark, British comedy is a change of pace for Frank Oz, the man behind *Bowfinger*, *Dark Crystal*, and the Disney bomb *Indian In The Cupboard*, but he's admirably taken on the challenge. Even with his inexperience in the genre, the film shows competence and a bit of flair for the wry sense of humour so popular on both sides of the pond right now.

The story centres on the weak-willed and mildly inept Daniel (Mathew Macfadyen), an aspiring novelist living in the shadow of his older brother Robert (Rupert Graves), an influential writer and all-around suave character.

Along with the rest of their friends and

extended family, the brothers have congregated at their mother's charming home in the English countryside to respectfully send off their recently departed father. The resulting product is the bastard child of *Monty Python* and *Meet the Parents*.

The funeral ceremony is anything but reverent. In fact, it's bound for disaster before it even creaks to a start. Simon (Alan Tudyk) is drugged on the car ride over and spends the remainder of the film either seeing very unfortunate things at very inopportune moments or being led from introduction to embarrassing introduction by his new fiancé, Martha (Daisy Donovan).

Martha has her own set of problems in the form of horn-dog Justin (Ewen Bremner) and her bungling brother Troy (Kris Marshall), who can't seem to figure out where he put his drugs. Howard (Andy Nyman), a friend of the family, is saddled with taking care of the decrepit and senile uncle Alphonse, played by Peter Vaughan.

While all of this is going on, the dark secrets of a short-lived sexual liaison steadily unfold, threatening the reputation of the family and the memory of its patriarch.

Each character adds their own brand of dry, sardonic wit, and the film pulls quickly from one problem to another. Within half an hour, the entire cast is hopelessly embroiled in a web of blackmail, drug-addled antics, familial friction, and murder.

The only thing hurting *Death at a Funeral* is that it relies too heavily on a crude kind of knee-jerk, situational comedy that undermines its clever plot and interesting relationships. But regardless, the delirium caused by this medley of oddball personas and events is nothing short of electric.



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

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