

Romantic films delight audiences of all ages

By Judith Trojan
Catholic News Service

This season's yuppie feel-good movie, "When Harry Met Sally..." (Columbia) has enough laughs, tears and truisms to satisfy anyone who's ever loved, lost and loved again.

Directed by Rob Reiner ("Stand by Me"), from his idea and a script by Nora Ephron ("Heartburn"), "When Harry Met Sally..." tracks the unlikely ways men and women connect for lifetime commitments.

Reiner introduces Harry Burns (Billy Crystal) and Sally Albright (Meg Ryan) as bickering carpoolers en route from their 1977 University of Chicago graduation to New York City. There they happily part company and embark on separate adult lives.

Over a period of a dozen years, during which time Harry and Sally establish careers as lawyer and journalist respectively, fall in love with others and settle into fulfilling lifestyles, they periodically cross paths in airports and bookstores.

The friendship stage of their relationship is inspired and highlights the painful differences between men and women when they try just to be friends and not fall in love. Reiner's key thesis, raised by young Harry early in the film, is that men and women cannot be friends without sex entering the picture. Sally, of course, disagrees.

Crystal and Ryan are refreshing choices for the imperfect protagonists. Aside from these delightful characters, both have best friends, Marie (Carrie Fisher) and Jess (Bruno Kirby), who are also casualties in the modern love wars. It's hard to believe that any man would reject blond, level-headed Sally, but they do, which is a nice anti-stereotypical touch.

And Harry grows up to be a surprisingly sensitive guy as a friend; but as a romantic lover, his bed-hopping and inflated feelings of sexual prowess are leftovers from the pre-AIDS Stone Age.

Sally lectures him on commitment and visibly demonstrates (demurely dressed and seated in a delicatessen) how women sometimes fake sexual pleasure to hold men. This comically played scene may put off some audiences with its questionable lack of discretion, although no nudity or sex is involved.

As Sally, Harry, Marie and Jess finally stumble into their ideal love matches, Reiner intercuts lighthearted monologues by elderly couples who recall how they met and married their lifelong partners.

Obviously scripted but taken from real-life stories, these Woody Allen-ish testimonials to the miracles of love and marriage wear thin after a while, as does the Allen technique of counterpointing action with tunes by Gershwin and other romantic composers.

Despite these contrived distractions, Reiner weaves an endearing story that will restore viewers' faith that true love and



Billy Crystal plays Harry Burns and Meg Ryan is Sally Albright in Rob Reiner's new film, "When Harry Met Sally..."

commitment are still here to stay.

Due to much graphic discussion of sex and implied promiscuity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Peter Pan'

Disney's 1953 animated feature-length "Peter Pan" (Buena Vista) has been reissued to delight the young at heart of all ages this summer.

An adaptation of Sir James M. Barrie's 1904 play about the impish 12-year-old

boy who challenges us never to grow up, the film expands on Barrie's vision in various delightful ways.

The rich Disney animation gives believable wings to Peter, his Lost Boys and the Darling children, Wendy, Michael and John. It also turns London and Never Never Land into dreamy fantasy panoramas.

Peter's pal, Tinker Bell, evolves from a fairy ball of light into a female pixie with a feisty personality. And Peter (with voice by Bobby Driscoll, a child actor of the period) is most certainly a boy. A previous

silent film as well as the many play and TV versions of the fable all employed women dressed as boys in the title role.

The musical interludes — some unobtrusively played, and others inspiring full-blown production numbers — are not as memorable as those found in the Mary Martin play and TV version. But Wendy's longing ballad "Your Mother and Mine" may bring a tear to some eyes, as will "The Second Star to the Right." Much of the music was written by Sammy Cahn and Sammy Fain.

Directed by Hamilton Luske, Clyde Geronimi and Wilfred Jackson, the film is also saddled with some unfortunate stereotypes. In the lengthy production number, "What Made the Red Man Red?" Native Americans are depicted as garish, red-faced lunks whose key vocabulary consists of "How!" and "Ugh!"

And since "a jealous female can be tricked into anything," according to Captain Hook (the voice of Hans Conried), Hook easily gets Tinker Bell to betray Peter because she's jealous of Wendy. Wendy (the voice of Kathryn Beaumont) is also jealous of Indian princess Tiger Lily and moodily withdraws from the action when Peter and Tiger Lily dance together.

Although "Peter Pan" holds up artistically almost 40 years after its initial release, the film's depiction (in image and song) of these racial and sexist stereotypes is certainly dated and wrong-headed. Parents and teachers might wish to enlighten children about these false stereotypes after viewing the film.

The USCC classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.

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