

FEATURE

'Princess Diaries': Disney without flair

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Disney's "The Princess Diaries" is the usual fare without much flair.

Unfortunately, the teen comedy has a pre-fab quality that connotes the Sunday night TV movies on "Wonderful World of Disney." Graceful, sophisticated and elegant, Julie Andrews injects the film with class, and her scenes are among the most interesting. But it is not enough to make this "My Fair Lady" teen redux anything more than mildly enjoyable.

Mia Thermopolis (Anne Hathaway) is a shy San Francisco teenager living at home with her eccentric artist mom, Helen (Caroline Goodall). Mia's awkwardness permeates everything she does, from debate class (public speaking makes her physically ill) to softball (she's about to fail gym).

And she's a constant target for Lana (pop singer Mandy Moore), the bullying cheerleader and most popular girl in school, as well as Lana's mean little minions. Mia's only wish is to make it through the 10th grade.

It comes as quite a surprise when the paternal grandmother she's never met bounces into town to announce that Mia is a princess. And a princess whose country desperately needs her.

Just two months earlier, the father whom she never knew but who always sent birthday gifts died. Her parents had divorced just after Mia was born. Queen Clarisse (Andrews), Mia's newfound grandmother, reveals that Mia is next in line for the throne of Genovia, a tiny European principality somewhere between France and Spain.

Mia is not interested, but no one says "no" to the formidable queen. So, how-to-be-a-princess lessons begin. Yet these scenes do not live up to their comic potential. Instead the audience sees numerous scenes in which poor Mia is relentlessly teased at her tony private



(From left) Anne Hathaway, Julie Andrews and Hector Elizondo star in the teen comedy film, "The Princess Diaries."

school — even after her wild and frizzy hair gets a major overhaul from Italian hair styling master Paolo (Larry Miller). And interest wanes again when the San Francisco press, upon discovering they have their very own local princess, attack Mia with their intrusive cameras and microphones.

Teen-age girls might appreciate the film's romantic angle, which has Mia going for the wrong guy (Erick Von Detten) while ignoring Mr. Right (Robert Schwartzman), who was pining for Mia even before he knew she was royalty.

Heather Matarazzo plays Mia's quirky yet angst-ridden best friend Lilly. She often steals the scene, especially when her green monster rears its ugly head to announce that the now beautiful Mia has sold out and is a "crowd wannabe."

Director Garry Marshall gets kudos for casting Andrews, and Hector Elizondo as the queen's security guard

who befriends Mia. Both add much to the film. And though Hathaway exhibits some talent for physical comedy, she needs a solid supporting cast such as this one to help her carry the film.

Though roadblocks are placed in Mia's path, her future as a princess is never in doubt. In the end, Marshall wraps it up with a Disneyesque moral: Mia learns to believe in herself and realizes the importance of self-sacrifice. Not too bad a message for such a mediocre movie.

Parents should be aware of a slight undermining of authority and a few brief kissing scenes. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences.

Navarro is on the staff of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.

Reviews

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette (VHS format) reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Office for Film and Broadcasting. Theatrical movies on video have a USCCB classification and Motion Picture Association of America (MPA) rating and indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

'Pollock'

Powerful portrait of modern artist Jackson Pollock (Ed Harris), his tumultuous relationship with wife Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) and his rise and fall from fame. Harris' directorial debut is an appropriately restrained work that grasps the troubled life of an artistic icon. The finely wrought performances are hindered by a somewhat lagging narrative pace. A brief sexual encounter, an extra-marital affair, alcohol abuse, some profanity and intermittent rough language. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPA rating is R — restricted. (Columbia TriStar)

'The Secret Garden'

Winning dramatization of Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's classic of a Victorian orphan girl (Kate Maberly) who comes to live in her uncle's remote English manor. She uncovers the mystery of a locked garden, transforms her sickly cousin (Hector Elizondo) and wins the friendship of a local lad (Andrew Knott). Directed by Agnieszka Holland, the tale of three lonely children discovering the wonder and joy of life in sending a neglected garden a vibrant and lush revival. The USCCB classification is G — general audiences. (Columbia TriStar)

GENERAL

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