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Movie Details

Post Author: Matt Ho July 5, 2013 0

OUR RATING 

DIRECTOR JAMES PONSOLDT

WRITER SUSAN BURKE, JAMES PONSOLDT

 4/5 2 votes

US BOX OFFICE \$377K

RUN TIME 1 HR. 21 MIN. **RATED** R

YOUR RATING

GENRE DRAMA

WATCH THE TRAILER SMASHED TRAILER

STARS [Aaron Paul](#) [Mary Elizabeth Winstead](#) [Megan Mullally](#) [Nick Offerman](#) [Octavia Spencer](#)

SYNOPSIS

Kate (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and Charlie Hannah (Aaron Paul) are a young married couple with a mutual love for heavy drinking. When Kate decides to try to get sober, their relationship is put to the test.

REVIEW

Though the pernicious nature of alcoholism isn't downplayed, *Smashed* is more toned down, and it becomes clear that director James Ponsoldt and writer Susan Burke's aren't headed towards the didactic route. At heart, the film is a coming of age story, as well as a concentrated look at the challenges sobriety brings to a relationship bounded by drinking. That is not to say Ponsoldt and Burke make light of the subject matter in any way, but there is a lighter touch.

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U.S Box Office

Weekend Box Office for 7/5/2013

Despicable Me 2	\$82,518,065
The Lone Ranger	\$29,432,000
The Heat	\$25,000,000
Monsters University	\$19,590,000
World War Z	\$18,200,000

Source: *The Numbers* - Movie Box Office

Advertising

Smashed has an unusually welcoming hint of comedic element that spares the film from absolute misery. There's nothing funny about alcohol addiction; yet, Ponsoldt and Burke incorporate drunken humor set under a familiar social environment the audience can relate to. Though the intention is to present the seriousness of both protagonists' issues, the scenes mirror the funny, outrageous, drunk times some of us have experienced or witnessed in our own lives that we're comfortable laughing at.

Kate's beer-swigging karaoke rendition of Nick Lowe's "Cruel to Be Kind," for example, is actually kind of adorable. And late night intoxicated croquet with a blender of mixed drinks, is the sort of spontaneous fun one can smile at. There's also a subtle lightheartedness *Smashed* surprisingly carries from Kate and Charlie's dysfunctional relationship. Alcohol may be the foundation for their marriage, but they do genuinely love one another. There's one particular feel-good scene where you watch the two soberly functioning as a loving couple sincerely enjoying each other's company. They're joking, hugging, holding hands and flashing affectionate smiles to one another in a brief moment of serenity where you sense hope for them.

The film of course, has its share of melancholy; *Smashed* is a drama after all. Ponsoldt and Burke waste no time diving into the gravity of Kate's addiction from the start; a morning sip out of a beer bottle mid-shower, followed by gulps of whiskey from a flask prior to teaching her first graders. The scenes of her drunken stupor, while amusing and relatable, remind us of the consequences that carless indulgences invite. Kate's past is revealed as a struggle ("tragic" might be stretching it) and it's the sort of back story you'd expect, but you feel for her nonetheless with each emotional outburst.

The film doesn't really display her difficulties abstaining from alcohol, so some viewers might find it unusual that she's never really seen craving a drink. However, another conflict is set up early on and other larger issues are highlighted: Kate's sad realization that honest living is boring, alcoholics receive little or no sympathy and that sober life may not complement her marriage.

The way the narrative plays out is fairly predictable and chances are you'll anticipate where the direction the film and the dialogue are going. But in spite of all that, Ponsoldt and Burke maintain our attention and make us care because Kate and Charlie are likable characters. Kate after all, independently realizes her problem without the need for intervention, and accepts the chance at sobriety when co-worker Dave (Nick Offerman) offers it to her. Charlie, though immature and irresponsible, is supportive (though in very small doses) and it's apparent that he really loves his wife. It's appreciated that the character isn't written as the brash, abrasive violent drunk archetype rocking a wife beater. Once *Smashed* reaches the point of high tension between the two, it becomes

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heartbreaking to watch since there's potential for things to work, but that constant dread of "too late" remains. There's also one uncomfortable scene involving Dave and Kate, though to be honest, I'm not sure it contributed anything to the plot.

I'm so thankful, so thankful for this boring new life of mine. -Kate Hannah

Mary Elizabeth Winstead is no doubt *the* star of the film. She's been involved in big movies that include the last two installments of the *Die Hard* franchise, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, and the ridiculous *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, but *Smashed* may be where she displays her credibility as an actress. Winstead perfectly portrays obnoxious drunk behavior we've all seen from childish dazed expressions, to confessional anger under an unstable inebriated state. She wonderfully balances the character's redeeming qualities as a loving teacher and wife, with a vulnerable side stricken with pain.

Aaron Paul, who's best known as Jesse Pinkman in *Breaking Bad*, plays another character who's an addict; however, he brings additional emotional range as Charlie while demonstrating excellent chemistry with Winstead. His critically-acclaimed show is hitting its final season, but I suspect he'll do well for himself given this performance, especially in his last two scenes.

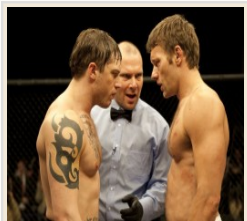
The rest of the cast is excellent as well. Husband and wife Nick Offerman and Megan Mullally flex their dramatic chops, which will be interesting for those familiar with their comedic work. Octavia Spencer is solid as Kate's sponsor Jenny, though I did wish Ponsoldt and Burke did a little more with the character.

VERDICT

Smashed was an interesting take on alcoholism considering how James Ponsoldt and Susan Burke could've gone with the whole morality direction and made it hopelessly depressing within the tone of *Leaving Las Vegas*. Instead, they manage to offer a glimmer of light with likable characters and a little humor that balance out the grim realities of addiction. There were certain parts of the story I would've wanted to see handled a little better and it does get a little predictable. Otherwise, the film is worth watching especially for the two leads, Mary Elizabeth Winstead and Aaron Paul, who are magnificent in their roles.



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