

Two Balls, Two Strikes

The Broken Hearts Club a romantic comedy



BY ROLAND F. PALMER

If you've been waiting for a gay *St. Elmo's Fire*, you should definitely catch director Greg Berlanti's *The Broken Hearts Club*. Berlanti indicated in several interviews that he wanted to "write a gay film that was about romance and not about sex", and that focused on "gay men [that was more] the way he knew the gay world to be, which is very mainstream and regular."

Tagged as a romantic comedy, this film does achieve most of what Berlanti wanted given the film's limited budget, but it definitely has some minor short falls that most gay male viewers will probably overlook, given the amazing cast.

Set in West Hollywood, we are introduced to Dennis (Timothy Olyphant), an aspiring photographer with nice pecs about to turn 28, who states, "I can't decide if my friends are the best or worst thing that ever happened to me." That's certainly a universal truth for most of us and sets the mood for the next 90 plus minutes of the film.

The friends referred to include Benji (Zach Braff), the somewhat innocent punk who likes the "gym bunnies", Howie (Matt McGrath), the psychology grad student who spends more time analyzing than living, Cole (Dean Cain), the charismatic "hottie" actor who goes through guys like clean underwear, Patrick (Ben Weber), the "oh I'm so average I can't stand myself or you" cynic, and Taylor (Billy Porter), the resident drama queen.

As in real life, many of our friends also happen to be co-workers. The group mentor, father figure, softball coach, and employer/restaurant owner Jack (John Mahoney) provides the pep talks, sage advice and occasionally dabbles in drag.

Jack, one of my favorite

characters, provides some relief to the somewhat bitter and edgy tone of this group. Jack always has a smile and gets the guys to play on his softball team (the Broken Hearts) each year, even though they rarely win a game. Jack seems to get the most out of life; it is disappointing that this doesn't seem to rub off onto any of the others in the movie. In one scene involving Patrick, Jack explains, "Not everyone is beautiful. Some people are just gay and ordinary," and then goes onto say, "We're the strongest I think."

This "slice-of-life" style film also introduces some interesting minor characters, including "J Crew Guy" (Chris Wiehl), who we too quickly assume is going to be Dennis's birthday present until he reveals he doesn't like Dennis's favorite group, The

Carpenters. We also have Patrick's lesbian sister (Mary McCormack) and her "I'm a bitch and proud" girlfriend (Nia Long) who decide they want Patrick's sperm so they can have a child. Finally, we have the new member to the club, Kevin (Andrew Keegan), who catches Cole's attention for a short time and then is befriended by Dennis. Kevin also provides a fresh perspective, like Jack, as he struggles to come out of the closet and isn't as jaded as the rest of the club. One has to wonder how jaded Kevin will be a year after hanging around with these guys?

The film maintains a good momentum, although some of the camera work is a little on the bouncy side. For those of you with weaker stomachs I recommend some Dramamine for the opening sidewalk scene. The film sometimes feels too "West Hollywood" which detracts the film away from achieving the goal of being more of a mainstream view of gay life than other gay films. Berlanti even admits in an interview that the film would have turned out much differently if it had been filmed in New York City. However, we can easily identify traits in each of the characters that remind us of someone we know.

I also think that some of the more poignant moments in the film were underdeveloped or glossed over. One example of this is when Cole finally meets someone he cares about and is faced with "the shoes on the other foot now" situation. He doesn't seem to learn anything; he's back to his old self almost overnight. This may have been

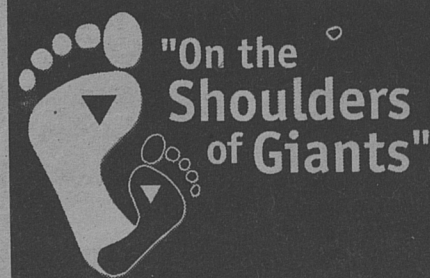
intentional on Berlanti's part, made-for-television writing, or just that it was an independent film and the resources just weren't available, or all of the above.

There are definitely some very memorable and funny scenes. Take for instance the "Gay Men's Therapy" sequences where the guys, who all happen to have the same hair stylist, compare themselves to the tribe of Somalian monkeys that Benji recently saw on a cable show. There is also a great "blind dating" sequence with Howie. Watch for "Listener Guy" and tell me that it doesn't remind you of someone you've met. Then of course who will forget the scene where the friends try to

support Taylor in his hour of need by selecting the appropriate music? Cue up the Beaches Soundtrack. Track four please.

The film cleverly pokes fun at itself in a few scenes where the characters compare themselves to characters in other "friend flicks" like *Steel Magnolias*. The film also gives us all a "gay" vocabulary lesson that is sometimes overdone (we are "meanwhile'd" to death), but still adds a sense of fun and lightheartedness. The film lacks the emotional resonance to break your heart, but for four dollars it's a fun film that won't break your budget either.

The Broken Hearts Club is released on DVD and VHS March 6th.



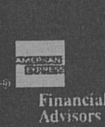
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