

What Maisie Knew



I always like it when the holds queue runs out on good, recently released movies.

What Maisie Knew might be one of the better ones I've seen so far this year. The story concerns a child who is shuttled between caregivers as her parents pay more attention to their careers and bitter custody battle than their own daughter. Based on the 1897 novel by Henry James, the film has been updated to present-day New York City (with a few other things changed as well, but it retains the core of the story). The movie is shown mostly from the little girl Maisie's perspective. Though, since she is a young child, the film centers itself around what we as the audience perceive as so-called mature viewers and what she innocently "knows". We don't really know anything about these people outside of what is shown to us, but we come to make judgments about their actions because of how they effect the child. It is an emotional film, constructed in a way to make you feel angry, sad, and hopeful toward the situations the child is put in.

All four adult performances are excellent: For fans of Alexander Skarsgård who have only seen him on True Blood, this is an entirely different type of role (also take a look at his recently released films Disconnect and The East). Steve Coogan displays a wry wit as usual (see Alan Partridge, Saxondale), but his part as the father is far from comedic. Julianne Moore brings her usual histrionics (see Magnolia, The Hours), but that works well for this film.

Newcomer Joanna Vanderham is probably the least well-written of the four, but the uncertainty in her role is still affecting. The six year old actress, Onata Aprile, is simply amazingly captured (sure to be seen in more movies after this). If you are looking for a good movie that is neither funny or uplifting (though still fascinating and touching), look no further. Though it concerns a particular set of circumstances that most families would never find themselves in (staying vague to avoid spoilers), I still found it captivating. It is rated R mostly for language. I'm at a loss for thinking of similar titles at the moment, though Kramer vs. Kramer is surely a precedential influence, or if you want a movie about really bad parenting, there's always Mommie Dearest (not at all related to this movie!).

Posted by Brandon R. on September 26, 2013

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