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P.J. Review

Posted by [Tony Farinella](#) on 02.13.2008

411's [Tony Farinella](#) reviews the independent film *P.J.*!



I've always said that the best friend of any independent film is its cast. Thankfully, *P.J.*, directed by Russ Emanuel, features an incredible cast of talented actors. The film additionally shows off New York in all its glory, with both vivid colors and beautiful sights. The film also has an incredible score by composer Neil Argo, which goes along well with the cast's fine performances and the beauty of New York City. Needless to say, the two are a match made in movie heaven. Yet at the end of the day, this still remains an actor's movie. The performers do their utmost to sell the material and give it their all in this film. For as stated above, in an independent film, it's all about the acting.

We open up our film by meeting Charles, played by Howard Nash, a young man who is sent to the hospital with a lot of questions. Charles is introduced to a psychiatric doctor played by John Heard. The doctor has a week to try and diagnose him and get him better before he has to be moved to a state mental institution on orders by his superior, played by Robert Picardo. Unfortunately, Charles has amnesia, so it's not exactly easy to get any answers out of him. Plus, his hands were ruined in a preceding car accident. What happened to this guy? How did he burn his hands? We are also introduced to his assistant, played by Vincent Pastore in a humorous role: when he's not helping out the doctor, he's trying to figure out the best way to win at the track.

After looking at all of his options, the doctor decides to call up his ex-girlfriend, played by Patrica Rae, to see if she has any answers on Charles. After meeting her, he discovers that she's very bitter and wants to stay far, far away from Charles as she needs to move on with her life. What is the doctor going to do? Time is running out for him. We soon learn he is also dealing with his own demons, and problems from a recently failed marriage. Can he keep it together? Will Charles come to his senses?

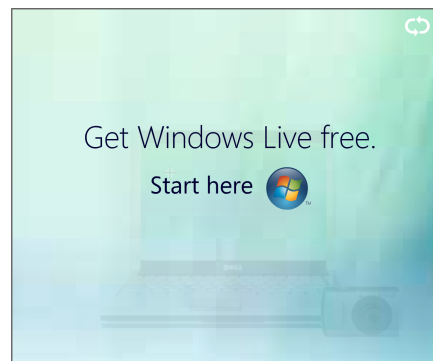


It's great to see John Heard on screen again in a worthwhile role. Although the story is about Charles, John Heard remains the heart and soul of *P.J.* He conveys a myriad of conflicting emotions and yearnings. I don't want to give too much away, but we discover a lot more about his character as the story unfolds (and the more we learn about him, the more we like him). He is a complex individual with a lot of baggage. Yet he's very reserved with his emotions, since he holds everything in. We soon learn he doesn't need to say a lot since he's dealing with his own pain. Here Vincent Pastore adds some much-needed comic relief. But overall, this is a very serious film that deals with some very serious issues, so it's nice to get a little humor once in a while. The good thing is that the humor is natural. It doesn't feel forced, or unnecessary.

The film also gets some fine supporting work from Patrica Rae as the ex-girlfriend of Charles. She's probably the most sympathetic character in the film, because we really feel for her and what she's going through. I mean, imagine if you woke up one day and your boyfriend (or girlfriend) was suddenly a different person. It would be quite a challenge, wouldn't it? Her performance is also fascinating because we initially don't really like her. She's bitchy, loud, and rude. But as we discover more about her, we slowly begin to feel for her. She goes from being the most unlikable character in the film to being the most likable.


And that's quite a feat.

If you are cynical, jaded, or bitter, *P.J.* is not the film for you. But if you believe that cinema can touch the human spirit and cleanse the soul, then *P.J.* is a must-see. The film asks you to go along with its characters on an emotional journey, and if you're not up for it, you're going to get left behind. Personally, I was willing to just go along with the storyline and not ask too many questions. But I don't know how many people will be able



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to do that, because the film takes a most interesting turn in the final act. That said, when the film was over, I was emotionally drained and worn out. And that's a good thing. It means that even though the ending is kind of out there, it works. And, at the end of the day, that's the most important thing about watching a movie. Were you moved? How did you respond to it? I responded to *P.J.* in a very personal way, though at times it does come off as a bit preachy (an element I wish they would have left that at the door.) Nevertheless, it doesn't ruin the impact of the final act, so I was able to overlook that easily.

As stated above, it's all about how you feel when walking out of a movie. And I felt pretty good, after all was said and done.

The 411: Director Russ Emanuel doesn't get too fancy in his feature-film debut, and doesn't need to because the material sells itself. All he needs to do is give his actors plenty of room to breathe, and they'll take care of the rest. With all that being said, Russ knows how to put the camera in the right place when it comes to shooting, especially in New York. He has a keen visual eye, to say the least. There's one particularly beautiful shot of John Heard outdoors in New York City, and it just takes your breath away. It's rare that you get to see such amazing cinematography in an independent film. So if you're tired of the same old independent movie that tries way too hard to be quirky, look out for the film, *P.J.* You won't be disappointed.

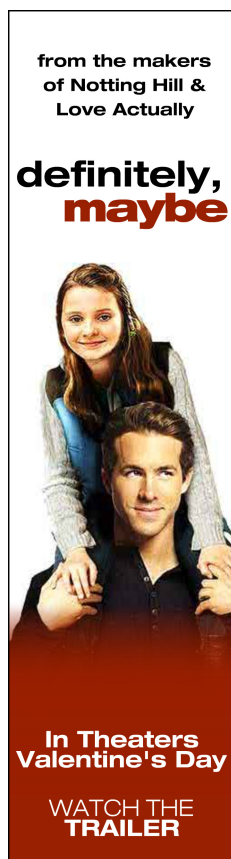
Final Score: 7.5 [Good] [legend](#)

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