

There's Quite a Payroll, but not Quite a Movie

By Stephen Whitty

Newark Star-Ledger (appeared in The Oregonian on December 9, 2011)

Should auld acquaintance be forgot?

I don't know, but "New Year's Eve" sure should be.

A shameless follow-up to Garry Marshall's similarly slapped-together "Valentine's Day," it's another landlocked "Love Boat" of a movie, with a dozen or so stars traipsing across a city looking for romance.

This time New York replaces Los Angeles; the Times Square end-of-year blowout substitutes for the cupid-and-chocolate festival. The corny plotting, though, remains in place. The dialogue is worse than ever.

Clearly the busiest writer on this project was whoever was signing the checks.

And the people grabbing them? The usual list of suspects, I'm afraid, including Halle Berry, Robert De Niro, Michelle Pfeiffer and Hilary Swank. Three Oscar winners and a nominee, and all apparently able to deliver any line of dialogue except "No."

What's the story? Oh, what's the point? De Niro is an old man dying in a hospital; Berry is his nurse. Swank is the neurotic executive in charge of the big ball drop; Pfeiffer, reliving the first part of her Catwoman role, is a drab drudge of a secretary.

Oh, and did I forget Sarah Jessica Parker as a nervous mother, Katherine Heigl as a love-lorn chef, Zac Efron as a bike messenger, Ashton Kutcher as a cranky cartoonist and Jon Bon Jovi as a rock star?

No, I didn't.

But I'm trying to.

Berry actually manages a few real moments in the midst of all this nonsense. Some of the New York locations are pretty. But Marshall (and screenwriter Katherine Fugate, who also wrote "Valentine's Day") seem to be tone deaf to what real life and real people sound like.

I suppose it's almost sweet that they'd think a group of Manhattan high schoolers would be worried about how to kiss. Almost.

And yes, Garry, you're a very good brother, but — I'm sorry — nobody is really longing to see your sister Penny again.

The movie ends in the usual welter of reconnections, realizations and "surprises" — none of which are surprising at all. There's also a cameo by the dynamic Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and a couple of songs. And a few unintentional laughs, and many new career lows.

"I've made so many mistakes," a wincing De Niro admits at one point.

Yes, sir. Yes, you have. And I've reviewed all of them.