

'Girl Next Door' isn't so 'Risky'

review by Jay Boyar
The Orlando Sentinel

In "The Girl Next Door," an 18-year-old overachiever falls for the new girl next door, who (surprise!) turns out to be an ex-porn star.

This leering premise, the production notes solemnly explain, "could easily have been turned into a raucous teen comedy." But director Luke Greenfield was after bigger fish - something "heartfelt, edgy and a little bit scary."

So instead of an unpretentious sex farce, what we have here is a sex farce with artistic pretensions. The film is like a hooker dressed up as a lady:

It wants to pretend it has class.

The production notes don't single out "Risky Business," but the 1983 Tom Cruise comedy seems like what Greenfield had in mind. The hero's name is Matthew Kidman, which may be a bit of a joke.

Like Cruise's old character, Matthew is an ambitious straight arrow who comes unglued when circumstances and a pretty face conspire to upset his tidy world. Entranced by his neighbor, the winsome Danielle, Matthew finds himself drawn into some pretty risky business himself.

The riskiest thing about it is Kelly, a charming thug who used to be Danielle's producer.

Kelly is determined that Danielle should come back to the porn world. So to save her, Matthew must descend into that world himself.

Is this starting to sound intriguing? Maybe it is, but only in a totally cheesy way.

Director Greenfield (Rob Schneider's "The Animal") has said that the film is about "exploring life's wild side." But it's really about titillation - covered with a



TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

It's all about the entrance in "The Girl Next Door."

deadening veneer of high purpose.

Part of what's wrong is that Emile Hirsch, who plays Matthew, doesn't have the dynamism - the star power - to carry a movie. Hirsch ("The Emperor's Club") has the nerdiness of a top student, but it's harder to see where his ambition comes from

That was never a problem with the turbo-charged Cruise in "Risky Business."

As Danielle, Elisha Cuthbert (TV's "24") is fine in the early scenes, when she's just supposed to look va-va-voom sexy. But later, when the mood turns grim and actual acting is called for, she doesn't always have it in her. Basically, Cuthbert can't stop twinkling.

There are, evidently, a lot of men who will pay for a hooker who looks like a lady. And there may be a lot of moviegoers who will pay to see a cheesy film

that looks like something substantial.

So if you're already entranced by Cuthbert's alluring photo in the ads and you need a plausible excuse to see this film, you could go for Timothy Olyphant's performance as Kelly.

Kelly may only be a porn producer, but he carries himself with the confidence of a movie star. His viciousness at first seems like sunny self-assurance, and it's easy to understand why Emile goes along with him.

But when Kelly is crossed, he's brutal. And Olyphant ("Go") makes you believe in that side of him, too.

"Sometimes in life, if you wanna do something good, you gotta do something bad," Kelly instructs Emile.

And sometimes, when you want to make a "raucous teen comedy," you have to tell yourself that it's "heartfelt, edgy and a little bit scary."

A&E Event Spotlight

Women's International Film Series



NEWMARKET FILMS

"WHALE RIDER"--A young girl, born into a dying New Zealand tribal community, must overcome her conventional grandfather's constant rejection to achieve her destiny as the girl who would bring back the honor of her people. Call it a feminist film or call it a love story; either way this coming-of-age drama is the perfect combination of tender storytelling and pensive cinematography. Niki Caro directs the film with a mystic diligence, creating a masterpiece of both heart and soul. Keisha Castle-Hughes gives a star-making performance as the strong-minded girl with an entire cast of compelling performances to back her up. Also starring Rawire Paratene, Cliff Curtis and Vicky Haughton.

"Whale Rider," directed by Niki Caro and starring Keisha Castle-Hughes, will be shown as part of the Women's International Film Series. The screening is scheduled for Tuesday at 7 p.m. in Reed 117.

Perry says goodbye to 'Friends'

by Joe Neumaier
New York Daily News

Matthew Perry says he had to fight back the tears when it came time to say goodbye to wisecracking Chandler Bing. "I didn't cry, but I felt like I was about to for like seven hours," the 34-year-old "Friends" star said in an interview.

"There was a sweet moment where my girlfriend (fashion student Rachel Dunn) and I went for a walk on the stage. No one was there. We just held hands and walked around. It was sweet."

Perry - and the rest of the cast - knew what they were leaving behind when TV's No. 1 comedy taped its concluding episode, set to air May 6, several weeks ago.

"None of us will probably be involved in anything as successful as 'Friends' again," he said. "That's something we just have to deal with."

"We can have big successful movies, but nothing will ever be that first time again, and nothing will likely span that long a period of time. So we look back, and kind of smile, and move on."

For Perry, moving on starts Friday with "The Whole Ten Yards," the sequel to "The Whole Nine Yards," playing hapless dentist Nicholas (Oz) Oseransky, who has to recruit his former neighbor, Jimmy the Tulip (Bruce Willis), and Jimmy's wife/fellow assassin, Jill (Amanda Peet), to rescue Oz's kidnapped wife.

"It's tough to have a movie-star persona when you're on a show as successful as 'Friends,'" Perry says. "There was talk the first few years about a curse for us movie-wise. But I don't think any of us will crash and burn now. I think we were very fortunate."

"If I never work again, that's not crashing and burning, that's called already making your mark."

"And, without the safety net of the show to go back to, I guess we'll all be a little more careful picking movies!"

Before "The Whole Nine Yards" in 2000, Perry's movies, including "Fools Rush In," "Unsung Heroes" and "Three to Tango," were not successful.

In fact, it was while filming 2002's "Serving Sara" with Elizabeth Hurley that Perry had a relapse of his addiction to painkillers and wound up in rehab. The actor had spent time at Minnesota's Hazelden clinic in 1997 for a dependency on Vicodin.

The press reported several relapses - along with an unrelated incident in which he crashed his Porsche into a house in the Hollywood Hills - which he says are over now.

"For me, it was never a question of breaking the law - it was a guy facing his private demons. So I was lucky. People seem to be behind me. ... The fact that everyone understood helped a lot."

His varying weight over the years was also "part of the struggles I went through," he says, adding: "I'm far away from the hellish parts of all that."

He still smokes, but is in great shape - though, contrary to reports, Aniston didn't act as his personal trainer.

"No, she offered to help me dress! I'm a T-shirt and jeans guy, and Jennifer wanted to help me be a better dresser. Not be my trainer - she's got better things to do!"

Born in Williamstown, Mass., Perry moved to Ottawa, Canada, as a kid, then got into acting after his first career choice - professional tennis - didn't pan out. He got roles in TV movies (he played Desi

Arnaz Jr. in the Patty Duke biopic "Call Me Anna") and failed sitcoms, then was the last actor to be cast for "Friends" in 1994, which ended up with each cast member making \$1 million per episode.

"It was a bit like, 'Do we really deserve this?' But without sounding weird, everybody made so much money off the show, the producers, the network, why shouldn't we be a part of it?"

"It was as if the six of us were in a slingshot, shot into this craziness," he says. "We were thrust into public life, and we told intimate secrets about ourselves before we learned that we don't have to talk about our private life."

Since becoming famous, Perry's been linked with numerous actresses and starlets, though he says many reports were rumors.

"Yes, some I dated. But most of the girls I was linked to, I never met."

One woman he did date was Julia Roberts.

"That was back in '95," he says. "The funny thing about that was, when I was dating Julia, we had camera crews all around outside my house, and when we broke up, they left and followed her!" he says with a laugh.

"I was like, 'Wait, I thought I made it.'"

Now, even though he's excited about his movie career, he still says wistfully he'd do "Friends" all over again.

"Everybody loved each other so much that, if it was about just being with the cast, I'd be there for another 10 years."

by Jack Mathews
New York Daily News

Can Mel Gibson sink "Titanic" and become the new king of the box office?

"The Passion of the Christ" has already earned \$330 million in U.S. and Canadian ticket sales since it opened six weeks ago, breaking all sorts of box-office records along the way.

That number is likely to soar in upcoming days, with audiences expected to flock to theaters during the Easter holiday to see the controversial film, which focuses on the last 12 hours in the life of Jesus.

In anticipation of a holiday surge, Newmarket Film Group added 194 screens this week.

That brings the total showings of "Passion" to 3,408, a huge number for a movie well into the second month of its run.

Now some experts are even saying that it's possible the blockbuster religious epic could eventually replace James Cameron's "Titanic" as the most popular movie of all time.

"Titanic's" \$600.8 million domestic box-office record is still a distant target, and its \$1.8 billion worldwide mark seems insurmountable, even with divine intervention.

But after "Passion's" astonishing first several weeks of business, one would be tempting fate to bet against it. Consider:

During its first five days in release, "Passion" grossed \$125.2 million, edging ahead of Oscar-winner "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" for the five-day opening record.

A day later, it raced past the \$128.1 million record for subtitled films set by martial-arts feature "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

Two weeks later, it eclipsed "My Big Fat Greek Wedding's" \$241.4 million record for an independent film.

By the end of March, it had knocked off "The Matrix: Reloaded" (\$281.5 million)

as the most popular R-rated movie released in the U.S.

Last weekend, "Passion" elbowed gentle "Forrest Gump" (\$329.4 million) out of the No. 10 spot on the all-time list of movie blockbusters, and seems destined to end up somewhere in the top five.

"Passion" is just now reaching international markets. But the early response has been strong, especially in Latin America and countries with large Catholic populations.

And it's been doing brisk box-office business in Arab countries across the Middle East, including Egypt, where it opened to large crowds last Wednesday.

It hit theaters in Russia on Tuesday, and premiered in Italy on Wednesday.

Whatever it does from here, "Passion" is making Gibson, who owns it outright, a very rich man. Industry analyst Anne Thompson reported in the Washington Post recently that when all receipts are tallied from "Passion's" worldwide theatrical run, its DVD and video sales, pay and network TV syndication, and books and merchandising, Gibson's personal account may be enriched by more than half a billion dollars.

And who's to say the movie won't become a popular Easter evergreen, re-released this time every year?

Whatever misgivings critics have about the controversial movie, no one can deny that Gibson has bridged film and religious culture in a way no other filmmaker has.

He's made a dramatized sermon, a tent revival writ large, one that calls on the devout and involves them in virtual real time in the most significant event of their faith.

"Passion" might deserve an asterisk wherever it ends up in the box-office records, but it could still be the greatest success story ever told.

Arts & Entertainment Highlights

Top 40 Singles

- "Yeah!" - Usher
- "This Love" - Maroon 5
- "Toxic" - Britney Spears
- "My Immortal" - Evanescence
- "With You" - Jessica Simpson
- "One Call Away" - Chingy
- "The Way You Move" - Outkast
- "My Band" - D12
- "Topsy" - J-Kwon
- "Numb" - Linkin Park

According to Billboard.com

Album Releases on April 13

- Cross Fade - "Crossfade"
Autopilot Off - "Make a Sound"
D12 - "D12 World"

New Movie Releases

- "Johnson Family Vacation"
"Ella Enchanted"
"The Whole Ten Yards"
"The Alamo"
"The Girl Next Door"

DVD Releases on April 13

- "Kill Bill: Vol. 1"
"Eating Raoul"
"Our America"
"Booty Call"
"Tokyo Godfathers"