

Home for the Holidays

Jodie Foster's second directorial effort (her first was the estimable *Little Man Tate*) is a comedy about the tug and dread of family--sort of a "You Must Go Home Again." Down-in-the-dumps art restorer Claudia Larson (Holly Hunter) is reluctantly heading home to Baltimore to spend Thanksgiving with her wacky parents (Anne Bancroft and Charles Durning), her wacky gay brother Tommy (Robert Downey, Jr.), her ultra-wacky Aunt Gladys (Geraldine Chaplin), and her uptight sister Joanne (Cynthia Stevenson) and her family. Added to the mix is Tommy's very straight and very unwacky traveling buddy Leo Fish (Dylan McDermott). Basically, cross words are exchanged, love is rekindled, hijinks ensue--and we all come out a little wiser about "relationships."

As written by W.D. Richter, *Home for the Holidays* has some funny bits, but that's all they are--essentially "bits" from a whole that just doesn't coalesce.

The problem appears to be casting: while rounding up a worthy line-up of individual players, Foster cannot--try as she might--make them into a real screen "family." Their differences in body and stature are radical. They are so individual (and self-consciously "wacky") that they defy any sense that they might be kin. It doesn't help when the one apparently "responsible" member of the clan--the anal-retentive Joanne--is made the too easy butt of jokes, such as getting the turkey in her lap.

The miscellaneous accents of this brood don't help, with this family from Baltimore exhibiting Hunter's soft drawl, Bancroft's Jewish mother delivery, and Downey's semi-patrician tones (although he now does live in Boston!). *Home for the Holidays* is not a waste of time, really. There are some tenderly-felt moments, there are some laughs, there is an intriguing performance from the now explosively rotund Durning, who seems both real and addled, especially in a rambling, yet dark soliloquy over the Thanksgiving bird. Still, one hoped for more given the talent present.

(There is one inadvertently hilarious scene for local folks: Claudia, leaving Chicago for Baltimore, drives to the airport to leave from--of all places, BWI!)

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