

YARD SALE

by Daniel Wible, Film Threat Magazine
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2004, Un-rated, 103 Minutes, Cannes Artist Productions, Inc.

The Great American yard sale as a metaphor for taking stock of one's life? Equating one's hopes and dreams and biggest disappointments with the toaster ovens and baseball cards and gravy boats of times past? It's not as big a stretch as you might think and "Yard Sale", the sweet little dramedy from writer/director Bob Logan, handles it beautifully. Not only is it the definitive film on the art of lawn chair commerce, "Yard Sale" is also one of the funniest, most affecting films I've seen all year. (Though of course, I still haven't seen "Catwoman".) This is that rarest, most pleasant of surprises: a light slice of fluff you'll want to share with those loved ones who don't exactly "get" your usual brand of film. It's a guilty pleasure, to be sure, but one short on guilt and heavy on the pleasure.

"Yard Sale" is ostensibly about that other Great American institution, divorce. But within minutes, it's clear that Mr. Logan and writing partner Robert Elisberg have other things on their mind besides smarmy lawyers and messy settlements. They have fashioned a bittersweet testimony to the dreams of youth and hard realities of "adulthood", all within the confines of the titular happening. More than anything else though, they bring relevance and much needed grounding to the proceedings with their joyously irreverent, un-P.C. sense of humor. Oh yeah, it also helps when you've got two incredibly talented newcomers as your leads, in the form of David Lipper and Andrea Robinson. Without the warmth and humanity and indelible comic timing of these two actors, the film simply doesn't take flight and engage the way it does.

Lipper and Robinson are Harley and Renee Atwater, respectively. (The two actors are so good that as soon as you meet the Atwaters, you'll swear you already know these people.) Harley is a struggling comedy writer and Renee is a successful hospital administrator. The Atwaters have been married for ten years, have no kids, and are splitting up. Since they're going their separate ways, they've decided to sell their house, along with many of their possessions. Thus begins what must surely rank as one of the wackiest junk sales in the history of all junk sales. In the course of just one day, the Atwaters must contend with, among others, an anal retentive neighbor, a moronic man-child, a precocious little girl, a hard-bargaining old lady, a gang of hoodies, and of course, themselves. It doesn't help matters much when the dissolving couple's moral (and labor) support, in the form of Harley's lewd, crude, and hungry best bud Alan (Michael Patrick McGill) and Renee's salty sis Elizabeth (Janiece Jary), offer no support at all. Yet through all the bargaining and bitching and bizarre encounters, Harley and Renee begin to reflect on their ten years together (in the form of annually-backtracking flashbacks) and even, come on you know you saw it coming, learn new things about each other in the process. (Renee never liked mushrooms on her pizza! Harley is considering getting a "real" job!) True, the two could never decide on the right time to have kids. And true, Renee's business ideas always took a back seat to Harley's comic book dreams and inevitable follies. Actually, when you get right down to it, there're probably many reasons why their marriage shouldn't work. But as "Yard Sale" so affectionately and comically shows, that's exactly why it just might.