

REEL CRITIQUE

"Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights" Lion's Gate Films and Miramax Films Starring Diego Luna and Romola Garai

Moviefgoers searching for the "time of their lives" will have to look further than "Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights."

Unfortunately, this not-quite-a-remake does little more than tout the name and premise of the 1987 original and fails to find its own success with a revamped storyline.

Set in Cuba's restless capital of Havana just before Fidel Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, American high school senior Katey (Romola Garai, "I Capture the Castle") is forced to relocate with her parents and younger sister when her father, a Ford Motors executive, receives a promotion.

Fans of "Dirty Dancing's" love story between Johnny Castle and Baby Houseman will have a sense of déjà vu throughout the movie, as book-worm Katey is immediately drawn to the intriguing, sexy Javier (Diego Luna, "Y Tu Mama Tambien"), a Cuban poolside waiter at her high-class hotel. In a place where class mixing was an understood social no-no, Katey and Javier are forced to pursue their dance-driven romance in secret.

Meanwhile, the political revolution taking place is made light of — an unrealistic and confusing trait of the script — leaving audience members wishing for a more thorough explanation of the issue that is so strongly affecting the characters.

Perhaps more interesting than the plot is the real-life story of Havana Nights' choreographer and co-producer, JoAnn Jansen, whose experiences living as a teenager in Cuba molded the setting of the movie. Jansen lived with her family in a fancy hotel in Havana, where she met and fell in love with a Cuban boy despite the influences of her high-class social circle.

This factual basis provided great potential for a new storyline full of individuality and flair, but the

writers came up short. The film was destined for mediocrity due in part to the screenplay, which lacks believability and depth and contains many attempts to reference Johnny and Baby's original rendezvous.

Still, the film's leading pair carries the inadequate script with as much talent and charm as allows, conveying a convincing chemistry and showing off energetic moves. Luna is the stand-out star of the movie, stealing scenes with his blend of sexy confidence and a charismatic smile.

An unnecessary cameo by Patrick Swayze provided more laughs than it did sense, giving a blatantly obvious nod to the original film and making the script to an even lower level of credibility. Also puzzling was the overwhelming presence of English lyrics in the songs that boomed through the Cuban clubs at night, especially the movie's closing number, a modern hip-hop piece performed by the Black Eyed Peas.

The bottom line is that while "Havana Nights" is no "Dirty Dancing," fans of the genre will enjoy the Latin dance numbers and the simplistic, feel-good story of a young woman's discovery of love and independence.

— Sarah Szumigalski

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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Director Peter Jackson to film 'Lord of the Rings' prequel

NEW YORK (AP) — Peter Jackson won't be returning to the Shire any time soon.

The Oscar-winning director is planning to film "The Hobbit," the prequel to "The Lord of the Rings," trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, but two studios must first fight over legal rights to the film.

Jackson said New Line Cinema has the rights to make the movie, but MGM has the rights to distribute it.

"I guess MGM's lawyers and New Line's lawyers are going to have a huge amount of fun over the next few years trying to work it all out," he told reporters recently in Los Angeles, according to AP Radio. "I'm obviously busy for a couple of years on 'King Kong' so those lawyers can just go at it for a long time."

"The Hobbit" tells the story of Bilbo Baggins, who found the ring and eventually passes it on to his cousin, Frodo Baggins. Frodo's journey to Mount Doom to destroy the ring is the basis for the "Rings" books and films.

Jackson said if he were going to direct the movie, he'd want it to feel like the rest of the trilogy. On Sunday, Jackson won an Academy Award for best director shared the adapted-screenplay award with his two co-writers for the final "Rings" film, "The Return of the King."

"I'd want Ian McKellen to be back as Gandalf, I'd want it to feel like it was part of the same mythology that we've done with 'Lord of the Rings,'" Jackson said.

"The Return of the King" swept this year's

Academy Awards, winning all 11 categories in which it was nominated.

Jackson is in the middle of remaking "King Kong," due out next year, starring Naomi Watts.

Scenes cut after complaint from actress' former manager

LOS ANGELES (AP) — NBC cut the final scene of its upcoming movie about the making of the popular television series "Charlie's Angels" after Fawcett's former manager complained.

Jay Bernstein threatened legal action if the scene was not removed, claiming it impugned his character and harmed his ability to make deals.

NBC spokesman Bob Meyer said the network was aware of Bernstein's complaint, but the ending was altered for artistic reasons.

"They cut it for time and they didn't want to take away the focus from the women," he said.

Bernstein was pleased with the outcome. "I don't want any money, I just wanted them to remove the scene," he said Thursday.

The scene showed a paunchy, Hawaiian-shirted version of Bernstein on Hollywood Boulevard hitting a blonde in his search for the next "Charlie's Angels."

Bernstein served as a paid consultant on "Behind the Camera: The Unauthorized Story of 'Charlie's Angels,'" which airs Monday night.

The new ending updates viewers on what happened to Fawcett and her co-stars through voiceover by Wallace Langham, who plays Bernstein.

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