

MOVIE REVIEW

'Happy Accidents'

Sci-fi and romance collide in "Accidents."

By Jan Stuart
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The American man of the 25th century has a bar code emblazoned on his arm, thinks that the polka music of his forebears is fabulous and is afraid of Chihuahuas. That is, if we are to believe a quirky character played by Vincent D'Onofrio, who claims to have time-traveled to present-day New York City by way of Dubuque, Iowa, and the year 2470.

Whether Marisa Tomei should believe him is the question that provides the fragile foundation for "Happy Accidents," a new romantic comedy from director-writer Brad Anderson. Unlike the picky, independent-minded single gal played by Hope Davis in Anderson's charming "Next Stop Wonderland," Tomei's Ruby Weaver is a hopelessly co-dependent romantic whose need to be with someone tends to get the better of her common sense.

When New York schoolteacher Ruby is not hashing out her issues with her psychotherapist (Holland Taylor), she trades survival notes with friends who toss photos of former boyfriends into a communal memory bin called "the ex-files." No one, least of all Ruby, knows what to make of her lightning-flash attraction to some Midwestern weirdo named Sam (D'Onofrio), whom she casually meets one day and who proceeds to ask her out on a date in front of her class. Seduced by his eccentricity and command of languages, Ruby invites Sam to live with her after only a few dates. Suddenly, Sam opens up a personal history that dates him forward in time some 469 years. Bemused and occasionally incensed as she is by such tales, Ruby is thrown most by her discovery among his belongings of a drawing pad with obsessive portraits of some babe named Chrystie Delancey.

The science-fiction leanings of "Happy Accidents" owe as much to its heroine's behavior patterns as they do to any futuristic elements. For many New Yorkers, Sam's tomorrow-land biography is a lot easier to swallow than the spectacle of a single Manhattan woman letting a man move in with her

before she has a handle on his work resume and arrest record.

If you're willing to suspend a barrel or two of disbelief, then "Happy Accidents" has its moments. Taylor, always a gas to watch, anchors all of her performances with the weight of intelligence and self-assurance. Tomei and D'Onofrio provide thoughtful, off-center presences that go a long way toward making Ruby's neuroses and Sam's fey assertiveness less irritating than they otherwise might be.

But even at just over an hour and a half, the is-he-or-isn't-he dilemma feels stretched to the breaking point. Anderson also directed the recent mental-institution chiller "Session 9," and you can't help but wonder if that's the movie that "Happy Accidents" wants to be. Any picture about a guy tattooed with a bar code seems more like an Orwellian horror story than a dewy romantic comedy.

MPAA rating: R for language.

'Happy Accidents'

Marisa Tomei: Ruby Weaver

Vincent D'Onofrio: Sam Deed

Nadia Dajani: Gretchen

Holland Taylor: Therapist

Independent Film Channel Productions presents an Accidental production, released by IFC Films. Writer-director-editor Brad Anderson. Producer Susan A. Stover. Executive producers Jonathan Sehring, Caroline Kaplan, John Sloss. Cinematographer Terry Stacey. Costume designer Victoria Farrell. Music Evan Lurie. Production designer Susan Block. Art director Lucio Seixas. Set decorator Kara Cressman. Running time: 1 hour, 36 minutes.

In selected theaters.

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