



FILM REVIEW: Tomei and D'Onofrio happily defy convention

University Wire; 11/8/2001; Lauren Sommer

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11-08-2001

(Cornell Daily Sun) (U-WIRE) ITHACA, N.Y. -- Boy meets girl, boy loses girl -- everyone has seen one too many sickeningly sweet romantic comedies. And yet in *Happy Accidents*, this tired genre is boldly revived when writer and director Brad Anderson merges it with science fiction. An unorthodox match, to say the least (*Pretty Woman* meets *The Matrix*?), but what results is a pleasant surprise--an honest and unconventional love story full of charm.

The narrative centers on Ruby (Marisa Tomei), an emphatic codependent who is drawn to the male equivalent of a fixer-upper. She hangs out with hip New Yorkers: loud-mouthed gal pals who keep an "ex-files" shoebox for disposed boyfriends. Enter Sam (Vincent D'Onofrio), a sweet and idiosyncratic hospice worker. As quickly as she has fallen for him, Ruby begins to notice his odd behavior -- his fear of small dogs and daily use of Dramamine.

This standard formula takes a twist when Sam reveals he is an escapee from the year 2470, and has "back-traveled" to find her. He comes from Dubuque, Iowa, which, in Sam's world is located on the Atlantic Coast due to the melting of the polar icecaps. Ruby attempts to believe it's a role-playing game, but struggles with whether to trust him or retain normalcy through the explanations of her shrink.

As absurd as the plot sounds, the film is carried by the artful chemistry between Ruby and Sam. A fresh-faced Tomei delivers the disenchanted Ruby quite well in typical exasperated fashion.

D'Onofrio balances her performance nicely by making the oddness of clueless Sam both endearing and believable. Their relationship is luckily far from formulaic, and Anderson's script, though it contains echoes of *Sex in the City*, is at once original and funny. It avoids the gloss and glam of most romantic comedies with its use of a gritty New York backdrop.

Happy Accidents could almost stand on its own without the science fiction element. Ruby is a typical twenty-something, balancing her need for love, her independence, and over-analysis from

her shrink ("I have a therapist to answer to").

In the vein of Tomei's *Untamed Heart*, it could be a story about love based on instinct instead of others' opinions. However, in the final scenes of the film, the story reaches new levels and adeptly dodges a trite ending through Sam's complex history (well, future).

Anderson does not get too weighed down by the technical details of time travel, but conveys its mystery well with intimate close-ups and disjointed montages.

The outcome is remarkably refreshing in a world where predictable John Cusack movies just keep rolling along. Anderson aims just high enough and achieves it, while avoiding convention and being, above all, honest.

When Sam and Ruby first meet, Sam exclaims, "the heart regulates time," speeding up and slowing important moments. The film is a reminder of exactly this -- that time should be a personal thing, and most of all, enjoyed.

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