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Film Review: Hachiko: A Dog's Story

By Stephen Farber, June 17, 2009 03:41 ET



"Hachiko: A Dog's Story"

premiere, sounds of sniffing permeated the large auditorium. The movie is no masterpiece, but it delivers.

Stephen P. Lindsey's screenplay is adapted from a Japanese film made 20 years ago, which itself was based on the well-known story from the 1930s about an Akita that came to the train station in Tokyo to wait for his master every day for 10 years after the man died. Lindsey changed the setting to Rhode Island and updated the story but retained the basic idea of a loyal Akita who achieves an almost-transcendental bond with his owner, a music professor played by Richard Gere.

Gere was one of the producers of the film, and it's possible that his interest in Eastern philosophy gave him a strong connection to the story, which begins when he discovers an Akita puppy that has been abandoned at the train station where he commutes to work. He brings the dog home on a temporary basis, but it isn't long before Hachi becomes a permanent member of his household. His wife, elegantly played by Joan Allen, objects at first to the dog's presence but is quickly won over. Characterizations are fairly perfunctory, so it helps that Gere and Allen bring conviction and dignity to their portrayals. Hallstrom does a good job creating a sense of community. The townspeople all chip in to look after Hachi while he performs his daily ritual.

Those who know the legend will realize where the story is heading, but it plays out effectively because Hallstrom handles the tear-jerking moments discreetly. The score by Jan A.P. Kaczmarek, an Oscar winner for "Finding Neverland," enhances the poignancy. The locale is skillfully rendered, and Hachi, played by three dogs as an adult and about 20 as a puppy, has definite star presence. The final moments of the film are absolutely devastating. Kids will love the movie, and their parents might be equally enchanted.

Venue: Seattle International Film Festival (Sony Pictures Entertainment)
Cast: Richard Gere, Joan Allen, Jason Alexander, Sarah Roemer, Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa
Director: Lasse Hallstrom
Screenwriter: Stephen P. Lindsey
Producers: Vicki Shigekuni Wong, Bill Johnson, Richard Gere
Executive producers: Jim Seibel, Paul Mason, Jeff Abberley, Julia Blackman
Co-producer: Dean Snyder
Director of photography: Ron Fortunato
Production designer: Chad Detwiller
Music: Jan A.P. Kaczmarek
Costume designer: Deborah Newhall
Editor: Kristina Boden
Rated G, 93 minutes

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