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The Kids Are All Right

26 January, 2010 | By Tim Grierson



Dir: Lisa Cholodenko. US. 2009. 104 mins.

The Kids Are All Right is such a consistently amusing delight, one could almost miss director Lisa Cholodenko's serious intentions beneath. A comedy about a lesbian couple's teenage children who go looking for their biological father, *The Kids Are All Right* is cleverly peppered with laughs in its examination of the modern "untraditional" family.



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Without calling much attention to it, Cholodenko makes the case for the bonds of family, specifically the need for society to accept gay couples with children.

Cholodenko's earlier films, *High Art* and *Laurel Canyon*, were small-scale dramas which failed to crack \$10m worldwide combined. But with *The Kids Are All Right*, she has shifted gear to deliver a more mainstream relationship comedy starring indie-film royalty Julianne Moore, Mark

Ruffalo and Annette Bening. Strong notices and word-of-mouth will certainly help this film in courting adult audiences.

Jules (Moore) and Nic (Bening) live happily in Los Angeles with their children, 15-year-old Laser (Josh Hutcherson) and 18-year-old Joni (Mia Wasikowska). Curiosity gets the better of the kids, though, and they make contact with the anonymous sperm donor their mothers selected. The donor, Paul (Ruffalo), is an immature, well-meaning man who agrees to meet the teenagers but soon becomes more deeply involved in the family.

Working with co-writer Stuart Blumberg, Cholodenko has filled her film with funny, relatable scenes about family and relationships, and much of the movie's pleasure can be derived from the expertly constructed one-liners delivered by a cast which plays the characters realistically without straining for laughs.

Although *The Kids Are All Right* encompasses everything from bedroom farce to coming-of-age drama, Cholodenko is able to pull together all these disparate tones because of the well-drawn emotional through-line which travels the length of the film. Without calling much attention to it, she makes the case for the bonds of family, specifically the need for society to accept gay couples with children.

The gay plotlines in both *High Art* and *Laurel Canyon* suggested the steamy, provocative side of lesbian attraction, but with *The Kids Are All Right* Cholodenko has brought homosexuality into mainstream society, portraying Jules and Nic as just another married couple experiencing the typical ebbs and flows of a relationship. Cholodenko's approach is brilliant in its subtlety, and by normalising her characters' relationship, she does her

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Global: Jan 15-17

- 1 Avatar (\$183.1m)
- 2 The Book Of Eli (\$42.9m)
- 3 Sherlock Holmes (\$38.3m)
- 4 Alvin And The Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (\$30.9m)
- 5 The Lovely Bones (\$20m)
- 6 It's Complicated (\$18.6m)
- 7 The Spy Next Door (\$16.2m)
- 8 Up In The Air (\$12.4m)
- 9 Invictus (\$8.2m)
- 10 Daybreakers (\$8.1m)

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part to remove the stigma that homosexuality still faces in conservative sections of American society.

But these observations on the film's politics should not overshadow *The Kids Are All Right's* likeable, sometimes silly nonchalance. This effortless, just-for-fun quality extends to the cast. Moore and Bening have been guilty in the past of producing overly studied performances, but they make Jules and Nic thoroughly convincing as an ordinary, devoted long-term couple. Ruffalo is superb as a free spirit who has gotten through life on his carnal appeal. And Wasikowska and Hutcherson do great work as siblings facing questions of identity and maturity, which, like the film's final moments, are extremely touching without being heavy-handed.

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Screenplay

Lisa Cholodenko

Stuart Blumberg

Cinematography

Igor Jadue-Lillo

Production design

Julie Berghoff

Editor

Jeffrey M. Werner

Music

Craig Wedren

Nathan Larson

Main cast:

Julianne Moore

Annette Bening

Mark Ruffalo

Mia Wasikowska

Josh Hutcherson

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