

MONTHLY MOVIES

COPYRIGHT (C) T. Rob Brown

Movie Review column for *Dvino Magazine*, a monthly production of *The Laredo Morning Times*.

May 2022

Copyright © 2022 T. Rob Brown, owner TRB Photography & Writing

Celebrating mothers through films

By T. Rob Brown

As I write this, it's Sunday evening on Mother's Day, May 8. I just ended a phone call with my mother for her annual Mother's Day call.

She asked what I was doing tonight, and I told her I'm writing my *Dvino* column. "What are you writing about?" she asked. "Mother's Day films," I replied. She likes to read my movie columns; it's good to have one guaranteed reader. Moms are always there for us.

Whether you celebrate the second Sunday in May or on Mexican Mother's Day, May 10—why not both? Moms are worth it—the point is that it's important to remember the women who raised us. They deserve our respect and a special day.

There are so many good films about the relationships between mothers and their children. Whether you choose "Mother's Day" (2016), the mother-daughter relationship of "Freaky Friday" (2003), the mother-son relationship of "The Guilt Trip" (2012) or even "Bad Moms" (2016) ... wait, that last one's not about their relationships with their children—though, I do agree that sometimes moms need a break. Motherhood is no picnic; it's a labor of love. At least "Turning Red" (2022) is about the deep relationship between a mother and her daughter.

Even the mothers we sometimes gain later in life deserve recognition, such as the film "Stepmom" (1998) which looks at how people navigate blended family life and the struggles which go along with that scenario.

Then there's the 1987 Diane Keaton film, "Baby Boom." This film's about a single career businesswoman who unexpectedly inherits a baby. She must learn how to become a single mother while balancing her career life. This one goes out to all those single moms who go it alone, while dealing with undue criticisms from people who just don't get it.

Often members of a family are similar but sometimes the children don't grow up to be exactly like their parents. The film "Dumplin'" (2018) explores this concept. Jennifer Aniston portrays Rosie, a former Texas Miss Teen Bluebonnet winner and current organizer of the pageant. Unfortunately, she never figured out how to relate to her plus-size teenage daughter. Throughout the film, she's rude toward her daughter and you just feel sorry for the poor girl. Willowdean (Danielle Macdonald), who her mother nicknames Dumplin', decides to enter the pageant in an act of rebellion, to her mother's dismay. As the film progresses, their relationship changes; they learn to understand and care more about one another.

"Dumplin'" rated PG-13, was directed by Anne Fletcher and stars Macdonald and Aniston. It received an 87% Tomatometer score and a 73% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 6.5/10 on the International Movie Database. It runs for 1 hour and 50 minutes.

Finally, this brings us to the main films I wanted to talk about in this article, the musicals: "Mamma Mia!" (2008) and "Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again" (2018).

The first film seems to focus on the daughter's attempt to find out which one of three men is her father on the eve of her wedding; in reality, it's more about the relationship between the mother, Donna (Meryl Streep), and daughter Sophie (Amanda Seyfried). And it's all set to a fabulous ABBA (Agnetha, Björn, Benny and Anni-Frid) soundtrack.

Their duet "Slipping Through My Fingers" sets the stage for what all parents and their children go through: the limits of time. We only have so much of it—it's our most valuable resource. One moment you're a small child in your parents' embrace and the next, you're a grown person living your own life, struggling to find time to spend with those you love. We must cherish all the time we have. We never know what life holds in store.

Throughout the film, Donna and Sophie learn more about each other. Sophie learns about her mother's history and the person she was before Sophie entered the world. Despite asking all three of her potential fathers—Sam (Pierce Brosnan), Bill (Stellan Skarsgård) and Harry (Colin Firth)—to give her away, Sophie ends up deciding for her mom to give her away. The mother-daughter bond won out in the end.

Another reason I believe this film focuses more on the mother-daughter relationship is because the younger versions of the three potential fathers look quite out of place, since they were played by the same actors in long-haired hippie wigs. It shows that the filmmakers didn't place as high of a priority on that as they did on the mother-daughter interactions. This situation improved with the second film in the series, though.

"Mama Mia!" rated PG-13, was directed by Phyllida Lloyd and stars Streep, Seyfried, Brosnan, Skarsgård, Firth, Julia Walters (Rosie), Christine Baranski (Tanya) and Dominic Cooper (Sky). It received a 55% Tomatometer score and a 66% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 6.4/10 on IMDb. It runs for 1 hour and 48 minutes.

The original cast returns a decade later, joined by younger versions of most of the main characters, as they retell the background of the original tale in more detail. Casting younger actors to play the younger selves of the three potential fathers and Donna and her friends, helped improve this film—though it feels kind of like a repeat overall. Many of the songs are the same and both films cover a lot of the same emotions, just tackled from a slightly different perspective.

Early in the second film, Donna's younger self (Lily James) proclaims to her friends, "Life is short, the world is wide. I want to make some memories." This calls back to the original film's focus on the passage of time. It's the one thing we can never get back once it's gone.

In this outing, we get to learn more about Donna's life after college and how she met the three potential fathers. Interestingly, I viewed the sequel first. It was the summer of 2018. My parents and my sister's family met me in New Orleans. We had the old Movie Pass, so we took a break from sightseeing one day to catch the film. I'm not a big musical fan but this film featured ABBA's music—which I remembered from my younger childhood.

The movie flashes back and forth between the past and the present as Sophie prepares for the grand re-opening of her mother's vacation villa on the Greek island of Kalokairi. The story takes a turn when Sophie realizes she's pregnant and might end up a single mother herself if her significant other, Sky (Cooper), doesn't come to his senses.

The daughter becomes the mother. There's a perfect symmetry to that. Lives come full circle.

"My god, Sophie, look what you've done with the place," Bill says after looking around the remodeled vacation villa during the grand re-opening.

"She wanted to make her mum proud," Sky explains to Sophie's fathers. "As if she hasn't done that all her life," Harry responds.

For most of us, that's one thing we'd like to know in life, that we made our moms proud.

"I have never felt closer to my mom," Sophie tells Sky after finding out she's pregnant. "I'm pregnant. I'm in exactly the same place that she was. Only this time, we know who the father is ... I have you and my three dads and she had nobody. She didn't even have anybody to tell."

"Mama Mia! Here We Go Again" rated PG-13, was directed by Ol Parker and stars Streep, Seyfried, Brosnan, Skarsgård, Firth, Cher (Ruby Sheridan), Andy Garcia (Fernando Cienfuegos), Walters, Baranski, Alexa Davis (young Rosie), Jessica Keenan Wynn (young Tanya), Hugh Skinner (young Harry), Josh Dillan (young Bill), Jeremy Irvine (young Sam) and Cooper. It received a 79% Tomatometer score and a 66% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 6.6/10 on IMDb. It runs for 1 hour and 54 minutes.

I find it interesting how the second film scored much higher with critics, yet audiences found them to be equal.

Whatever you do this month, take a moment to show some love and respect to your mom(s). Moms don't usually want us to spend a lot of money on them, but they do love to know you're thinking about them and remembering them. The little things really count. After all, moms deserve a whole month—not just a single day.

Love you, Mom, this column's dedicated to you! And happy Mother's Day month to the rest of the mothers out there. Without you all, we wouldn't be here.

"The show must go on."