THE ARTS

Cool Runnings is slapstick, but inspiritional

COOL RUNNINGS
Directed by John Turteltaub
Starring Leon, Doug E. Doug, Malik Yoba, Rawle D. Lewis, and John Candy.

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Yes, Cool Runnings doesn’t show us too much new. While coming up with a good deal of slapstick, the film still manages to seem like a blend of Rocky (a bit from all five), Chariots of Fire, and Personal Best. Indeed it is another underdog showcase for Disney to instill lots of “wholesome” messages in the countless children who will undoubtedly flock to the theaters. In many ways, the producers’ motives are completely transparent. And yet, somehow a film like Cool Runnings never ceases to inspire.

Based on the true story of the 1988 Jamaican Olympic Bobsled Team, the film first tries to lay down some kind of foundation for its ensuing comedy and story of triumph. We meet Derice Bannock (Leon), whose obsession with winning from his gold medalist dad, the team’s coach Irv (John Candy) lost his bobsledding gold medal in disgrace sometime in his humblest past.

The same predictability colors the rest of the subplot. In Junior’s case, we witness his coming to terms with “being a man” and with fighting the will of his domineering father, Yul Brenner, Junior’s enemy at the start, of course spurs this transformation, and they both become great friends.

As for the Olympic competition, the movie is full of the usual clinchers. The Jamaicans bomb. The Jamaicans triumph. They bomb, but still triumph. The tension in all these race scenes is of course heightened by the presence of nasty East German racers making cruel remarks about how the “Jamaicans should go back to where they came from.”

As you can tell, the film operates on a very simple, yet reliable, level. The themes rather take care of themselves, because they strike a very human chord of achievement against near impossible circumstance. Though the film indeed recycles material seen in many other similar films, it is only because the material is so appealing.

Perhaps I sound too flippant about my opinions of the film. I saw the film with the strong convictions, philosophy, passion, and humor without overacting. Once I got over the fact that I had already seen this movie countless times, I let myself be pulled into a story of men facing their extraordinary goals and inspiration. Indeed, the film has its own unique scenario. The story confronts the supposed inanity of these bohledders from a land where there is no such thing as snow, and asks, among all the aspirations in the world, who are the true bohledders?

The filming of bohledders in the night is especially surreal, and the final scene, in particular, evokes a majesty all its own. Even the serious scenes between Yal and Junior about respect and dignity offer true gravity instead of transparent morality. But I liked best Candy’s work as the coach. He manages just the right tone in portraying a coach with strong convictions, philosophy, passion, and humor without overacting.

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