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May 20, 2011, 8:57am

Friday Film: Woody Allen's Parisian Sleight of Hand

By Dorri Olds



Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

In his new movie, "Midnight in Paris," Woody Allen did what he does best. He created a character out of a city and added his signature sleight-of-hand magic. Think "[The Purple Rose of Cairo](#)," when a handsome leading man steps through a screen to romance a depression-era Mia Farrow, or "[Zelig](#)," when the title character appears on the nightly news with the Pope and Calvin Coolidge.

"Midnight in Paris," which premiered at the Cannes International Film Festival earlier this month and opens in limited release May 20, reverberates with that same abracadabra wish fulfillment. "I always feel that only a magical solution can save us," Allen said [in an interview](#) with L.A. Weekly. "The human predicament is so tragic and so awful that, short of an act of magic, we're doomed."

The film's main character (and Allen's alter ego) is Gill, played by Owen Wilson. A successful American screenwriter filled with nostalgia-fueled musings, he romanticizes Paris the way Allen does Manhattan in many of his other films. Gil idealizes the Roaring '20s and he imagines his heroes — F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein — writing their masterpieces in the City of Light, with Cole Porter's

jazz playing in the background.

Gil is engaged to Inez (Rachel McAdams), an unbearably shallow and domineering brat whose father, Scott (Tom Hiddleston), is a staunch Tea Party-loving Republican snob. While Gil loves getting caught in the rain, Inez shrieks, worrying about her \$1,000 shoes. Gil, pretty much a romantic mensch with his head in the clouds, is the opposite. He's a simple guy who, seeking meaning, gets squirrelly around pretentious wealth — a recurring theme in Allen's movies.

Fed-up with writing commercial schlock, Gil yearns to write a meaningful novel. This perturbs his fiancée, who wants him to stick with his shtick to keep the big checks rolling in. Inez is such a pain in the *tukhes*, it's clear that their only link is an initial infatuation based on sex. But Gil can no more recapture that joy than Alvy Singer could save his relationship in [“Annie Hall.”](#) Instead Gil chases after beautiful, vulnerable Ariana (Marion Cotillard), a French muse, but it becomes clear she's trapped in a mirror enigma — idolizing her golden era, *La Belle Époque*. Neither can enjoy the present while fixated on the past.

The film's message — “Be true to yourself or you'll be miserable” — may seem too on the nose, and postcard shots of Paris too corny, but it all works. *“Midnight in Paris”* is pure Woody Allen, a Jewish genius visible even behind all his doppelgangers.

Watch the trailer for ‘Midnight in Paris’:

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Lavanya · 2 weeks ago

+2

Dorri, your review makes me want to see the movie. Thank you for this.

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Carmine Bassano · 2 weeks ago

+1

ditto . . .

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Carmine Bassano · 2 weeks ago

+1

. . . just wanted to add that I appreciate the concise, straightforward and the so-very-CLEAR tone of the review above . . . an excellent endorsement because all of it is presented so interestingly and intelligently . . . much appreciated. ". . . a simple guy seeking meaning . . ." is something we all can identify with in our secret soul . . . again, great review!

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carolyn · 2 weeks ago

+2

great review Dorri. I will definitely see it thanks to your suggestion. Love Woody Allen the film maker.

[Reply](#) [▼ 1 reply](#) · active 104956 weeks ago

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Dorri Olds · 2 weeks ago

+1

I do think it's the best movie he's made in years.

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www.jimbreslin.com · 2 weeks ago

+1

Woody Allen is still a master and the idea of this movie being set Paris is awesome! I loved Vicky Christina Barcelona and this looks intriguing. It's also interesting to see Owen Wilson and Rachel McAdams together again after the Wedding Crashers. Is this a new romantic comedy team developing onscreen? - Jim Breslin

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Dorri Olds · 2 weeks ago

0



Rachel McAdams is unrecognizable in this almost. She plays such an unlikable person!

Reply

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Lawrence E. Forbes · 2 weeks ago

+1



I'm a fan of Allen's that sometimes loses track of when his films are playing in theaters. Thanks to your great review, I'm in no danger of missing what sounds--and looks--like a fantastic movie.

Reply ▼ 1 reply · active 2 weeks ago

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Dorri Olds · 2 weeks ago

0



Thanks Lawrence!

Reply

Report



Dr. Thomas Romo · 2 weeks ago

+1



Thank you for your review. I couldn't tell by watching the trailer if I'd like the film. But it's helpful to know that there's some of that famous Woody Allen magic to expect!

Reply

Report



Thomas Romo · 2 weeks ago

+1



I couldn't figure out why my other people's photos displayed next to their comments and mine didn't. I realized it's because I hadn't logged in through Facebook! So here's my face!

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Ellen ***an · 2 weeks ago

+1



Super article, enjoyable written! Owen Wilson almost seems to be doing old Woody Allen schtick...but I kind of like it. Thanks for the vibrant review!

Reply ▼ 1 reply · active 2 weeks ago

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Thomas Romo · 2 weeks ago

+1

Hi. I never imagined that Owen Wilson would do such a good job as the type of neurotic guy that Woody always plays. But he did do a great job. Really! If you go see the movie let me know what you think!

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Lina · 2 weeks ago

+1

I like the "Be true to yourself or you'll be miserable" message... So Woody. Didn't he once say "I would never join a club that would accept me as a member."

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Sally · 2 weeks ago

+1

Hi. He probably said it, but Groucho Marx said it first.

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T.Remington · 2 weeks ago

+1

Just saw it last night and love your review! (We'll be going back for seconds)

[Reply](#) **1 reply** · active 2 weeks ago

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Dorri Olds · 2 weeks ago

0

Great! So glad you enjoyed the movie (and the review)!

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Sally · 2 weeks ago

+1

I loved this review -- and can't wait to see the movie. I'm sure I'll love that too. The way you described the story it sounds like fun, and scenes of Paris are always enchanting.

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steve geng · 2 weeks ago

+1

@Sally: In an interview Dorri did with the Wood-man after the screening, he admitted that he got all his best gags from Groucho.

@Dorri, what I like best about your review is that you didn't give away the magical gag, like most other reviewers did, and spoil the moment for us.

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Mark Fuerst · 2 weeks ago

+1

Nice review! I haven't seen Woody's recent movies, but your review makes me want to see this one! Thanks much.

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[▼ 2 replies](#) · active 2 days ago

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Dorri Olds · 2 weeks ago

0

Thanks for the kind words. I went to see it a 2nd time. I really enjoyed it.

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Dorri Olds · 2 days ago

0

great! thanks for the comment.

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