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MOVIE REVIEW

There Will Always Be a Fantasy England 'Cheerful Weather for the Wedding,' With Elizabeth McGovern



Julian White/IFC Films

Felicity Jones in "Cheerful Weather for the Wedding."

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

Published: December 6, 2012

Starring Elizabeth McGovern as Hetty Thatcham, the widowed matriarch of a well-heeled British clan, "Cheerful Weather for the Wedding" may look like an offshoot of "Downton Abbey."

This barbed comic satire, adapted from a novel by Julia Strachey, is more downscale than its forerunner. It has no counts and countesses, no illustrious family tree to consider and no sense of history.

In another "Downton Abbey" gesture, the movie trots out a grand, Maggie Smith-like dowager, Aunt Bella (Barbara Flynn), a late-arriving guest who registers her peevish disapproval of everyone and everything in trilling tones.

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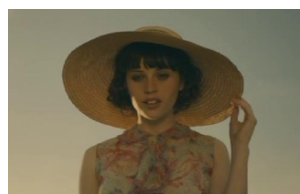
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Uncle Bob (Julian Wadham), a lecherous vicar who cozies up to Evelyn (Zoë Tapper), a bridesmaid; and a bratty 7-year-old, Jimmy (Ben Greaves-Neal), who sets off confetti bombs under the dining room table.

Directed by [Donald Rice](#) from a screenplay he wrote with Mary Henely Magill, “Cheerful Weather” is a movie divided against itself. The glossy appearance and trappings may evoke standard Anglophile nostalgia, but below the veneer is a cynical portrait of bored, shallow Britons halfheartedly going through the motions of a celebration.

What drama there is revolves around the appearance of Dolly’s old beau Joseph Patten (Luke Treadaway), a handsome young anthropology professor with a dimpled chin whom Dolly invites without first informing her mother. Joseph, who has just returned from Greece, is still in love with Dolly, whose presentable but none-too-bright fiancé, Owen Bigham (James Norton), plans to whisk her to Argentina for two years.

This nervously edited film flashes back and forth from the dreary December gloom to Dolly and Joseph’s lushly photographed summer of love a few months earlier. For reasons that are disclosed only at the end, Dolly and Owen are rushing into marriage after a two-month engagement. On the morning of the wedding, Dolly is so petrified that she vomits, then pacifies herself by guzzling rum from the bottle.

In addition to unsettled weather, ominous portents include the groom’s mislaying of the ring, and his first squabble with Dolly, in which he refuses to take her beloved pet turtle on the overseas voyage.

If the movie had more courage, it would lay waste these people as hilariously as Robert Altman’s film “[A Wedding.](#)” But as its bad vibes accumulate, “Cheerful Weather” exhibits all the energy of a disgruntled wedding guest muttering complaints under his breath.

Cheerful Weather for the Wedding

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Directed by Donald Rice; written by Mary Henely Magill and Mr. Rice, based on the novel by Julia Strachey; director of photography, John Lee; edited by Stephen Haren; music by Michael Price; production design by Anna Lavelle; costumes by Camille Benda; produced by Teun Hilde; released by Goldcrest Films. Running time: 1 hour 35 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Felicity Jones (Dolly Thatcham), Luke Treadaway (Joseph Patten), Elizabeth McGovern (Mrs. Thatcham), Mackenzie Crook (David Dakin), Fenella Woolgar (Nancy Dakin), Barbara Flynn (Aunt Bella), Ellie Kendrick (Kitty), Sophie Stanton (Millman), Julian Wadham (Uncle Bob), James Norton (Owen Bigham), Ben Greaves-Neal (Jimmy) and Zoë Tapper (Evelyn Graham).

A version of this review appeared in print on December 7, 2012, on page C15 of the New York edition with the headline: There Will Always Be a Fantasy England.

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