

Tyler Perry's back in drag for adaptation of "A Madea Christmas"

Written by Kam Williams



Mabel "Madea" Simmons is the moralizing, motor-mouthed senior citizen created and first introduced on stage by the incomparable Tyler Perry. The compulsive granny is a self-righteous vigilante who can't help but intervene on the spot whenever she sees an innocent victim being bullied by a sadistic villain.

At the point of departure in "A Madea Christmas," the eighth screen adventure in the popular film series, we find her working as Mrs. Santa Claus in a downtown Atlanta department store. The seasonal job affords the politically-incorrect impersonator an opportunity to shock kids and their ears-covering parents with a profusion of her trademark off-color asides and English-mangling malapropisms.

Soon after she's unceremoniously relieved of her duties, Madea decides to drive with her niece, Eileen (Anna Maria Horsford), to tiny Bucktussle, Alabama to spend the holidays with the latter's daughter, Lacey (Tika Sumpter), the local schoolmarm.

What neither of them knows is that Lacey recently eloped with a likable local yokel, but failed to inform her mom about the marriage because Conner (Eric Lively) is white. She fears her mother might object to the interracial liaison. Complicating matters further is the fact that coming along for the ride is Oliver (JR Lemon), Lacey's ex-boyfriend who'd like to rekindle a little romance.

Meanwhile, Oliver has told his parents, Buddy (Larry the Cable Guy) and Kim (Kathy Najimy) about the nuptials, and they are arriving soon from Louisiana, so something's gotta give. But rather than come clean, Lacey enlists her new in-laws' help in hiding the truth.

Unfolding in accordance with the age-old "One Big Lie" TV sitcom formula, "A Madea Christmas" is a pleasant, if predictable, modern parable peppered with plenty of humorous asides. Tika Sumpter and Eric Lively manage to generate just enough chemistry to be convincing as the shy newlyweds.

But the production is at its best when Madea and equally-outrageous Buddy are trading barbs toe-to-toe. For instance, when he tries to tell "the one about the two rabbis and the black dude," he's cut off by Madea asking if he's heard "the one about the stray bullet that kills the redneck

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for telling the story about the two rabbis and the black dude."

Sassy sister squares-off against backwoods hillbilly for lots of harmless laughs!

Very Good (3 stars)

Rated PG-13 for profanity, crude humor and sexual references

Running time: 105 minutes

Distributor: Lionsgate Films

To see a trailer for "A Madea Christmas," visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SLe_ElpeWI