

THE HOURS:

Director Stephen Daldry has wonderfully adapted a novel by Michael Cunningham and created a remarkable movie filled with ideas and is richly acted. The movie is three stories in one and weaves across three generations. The wonderful and absorbing screenplay is by David Hare.

It is like a stream of cosmic consciousness in that the stories intertwine with each other spiritually, intellectually and emotionally over time. First, Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman) writes a novel "Mrs. Dalloway" in 1923 England. The book is about a lonely woman who sets out to have a party and cares for others before herself. The second story in the movie is about Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) in 1951 California who reads the book and Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep) in 2001 New York who lives it. The movie intentionally has a solemn feel to it and has little humor.

As Virginia Woolf, Kidman displays a melancholy personality matched only by her perceptive though misunderstood intuition. She is emotionally unstable (by the day's standards) and has visions. Her askew look at things exemplifies her imbalance. Yet, Kidman beautifully displays a placid outward demeanor, which disguises the turbulent rushing waters of a troubled mind through her glances, her conversations and her writings of the book "Mrs. Dalloway." It's her eyes that speak volumes about her and it's her glance that absorbs the world around her.

The acting is top notch. Kidman is a revelation and has many powerful and intense moments. Julianne Moore as Laura displays a life of "quiet desperation" and lets her life slip away. Woolf knows what to do and takes action. Meryl Streep as Clarissa is aided by her former husband and takes his own life to save hers. It is, as a friend told me, Clarissa who lives her life deluded by the belief that her one moment of happiness was with a man in the past only to discover that she was missing her "present moments" while being held captive by their past.

The film is an intellectual experience on the meaning of life and living rather than an emotional experience. It is complicated but not confusing. It spins around itself. It is timely. It is timeless. The seamless editing in going back and forth in the stories is exact and captivating.

It reminds this reviewer of "My Dinner with Andre" and "The Remains of the Day." Both of those movies were also filled with ideas, philosophy, contemplation and, therefore, ageless.

"The Hours" is about the fleetingness of happiness and the "moment". We can't capture the moment and we rarely appreciate "happiness" even when it's in front of us. Only when we don't have either one, do we understand. It is all an illusion.

The movie has several potent if brooding moments. In the most moving sequence, as Woolf tries to run away from her life at a train station, her moment of "quiet desperation" is tumultuously reflected upon and swept away when she exclaims to her loyal husband Leonard (Stephen Dillane), "This is not the city I chose to live in. This is not the life I chose to live." The second part of the statement is chock full of implications, because, it's not just about Virginia Woolf, it's about all of us. This scene alone is worth the price of admission and the surprise ending will take your heart away. We leave the theatre knowing about Woolf's ending, but what of Laura and Clarissa? Clarissa will make it. But, what will become of Laura? She ran away from her unfulfilling marriage, as she says, to escape "death" and chose "life." But what "life" has she had?

There are several homosexual relationships and circumstances in the film. They are a part of the characters, though they were unspeakable in 1920s England, only hinted at in 1950s America, and openly accepted in 2001. This element in the movie is somewhat perplexing, because one might ask, "Why did director Daldry focus so much on this type of relationship?"

The story is brimming with philosophical ideas especially living for oneself not for the benefit of others. Woolf says that in order to appreciate life, someone must die and therefore we can then reflect upon our being. And that someone is the poet. Essentially, it is a movie about ideas and the freedom of deciding one's own course with life's complications and roadblocks notwithstanding.

Ultimately, this is a reflective movie opulent in thoughts that will reverberate in the corridors of your mind.

110 Minutes

MPAA Rating: PG-13 (for mature thematic elements, some disturbing images and brief language)

RATING: A-