

‘The High Note’ carries a pleasant tune

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 113 minutes

This title from Focus Features will be available May 29th as a streaming rental on all platforms.

There seems to be a trend recently of producing films based around the music industry, with titles like the hit remake of *A Star is Born* as well as *How to Build a Girl* (a feature I didn't care for that began streaming about a month ago).

The High Note

is another effort from a similar mold. It's a romance film set in the world of L.A. songwriters, performers and producers. Admittedly, there isn't a whole lot about the story that will defy expectations or surprise viewers. Still, it features beautiful L.A. photography and a charming cast of music-obsessed characters that viewers will believe truly inhabit this environment.

Maggie (Dakota Johnson) is the personal assistant of famous and very private singer Grace Davis (Tracee Ellis Ross). Her duties include following the artist around and catering to her every whim. Of course, the gopher has deeper ambitions of being a music producer. Whenever she can, Maggie tries to offer new ideas to her employer, much to the chagrin of manager Jack Robertson (Ice Cube). While grocery shopping, the protagonist meets singer David Cliff (Kelvin

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Harrison Jr.) and is immediately struck by his natural talent.

She offers her services to him as a producer and the two set out to record his material. Of course, as she and Cliff spend more time on the project, a relationship develops and Maggie finds it difficult to keep her stories straight and these two parts of her life separate.

As mentioned, if you've seen one romantic comedy, then you'll pretty much know what to expect from this effort. Maggie is an eager go-getter who feels taken for granted and strives to prove herself and make her mark in the industry, learning in the process that trust means a great deal to talent and understanding that some of her deceitfulness may have consequences. The screenplay hits all of the expected story beats. This means that the tale does lag a bit in the middle and there isn't much question about in what direction the story will ultimately take its heroine.

So, a movie like this really depends on the characters and their interactions. Unlike some titles that just use the music industry as a backdrop and soon forget about their profession, these people truly love music. There are numerous conversations and debates between Maggie and rising artist David about their favorite artists, not to mention discussions about songwriting, how to record and even mix a track. The Grace Davis part carries an appropriate mix of gravitas, self-importance and insecurity about her stardom.

Ice Cube shines as the entertainingly gruff manager, a lifelong friend of the diva Davis who is solely concerned with maximizing their profits and not taking any chances with her career.

And even though Maggie is sharp and persuasive when it comes to laying down a killer track, the script does offer her an arc and the opportunity to learn that maintaining personal relationships is just as important as technical abilities. The beautifully filmed Los Angeles locations are another plus. There are plenty of impressive sunset shots and glowing nighttime images of the city. A sudden trip to Catalina Island also offers scenic vistas and an amusing cameo from Maggie's father (Bill Pullman), a radio DJ who is equally obsessive about his music collection.

The movie does try to include a little spin toward the end in an attempt to shake things up. Truthfully, it may not come as a shock given some of the evasive behavior on display from a few

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of the cast members earlier in the film. Yet, even if the finale doesn't provide a sharp sting, *The High Note* is still a very nicely shot and likable drama with passionate characters who love music and are believable. It carries a pleasant tune.

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