

‘Being the Ricardos’ peek behind the scenes may not live up to the actual show

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 131 minutes

Amazon Studios will release this film in theaters Dec. 10 and globally on Prime Video Dec. 21.

Lucille Ball is an iconic figure in television, perhaps most famous for her work starring in the 1950s series “I Love Lucy,” and later as a producer and studio executive. Her TV show is considered one of the best and most successful sitcoms that ever aired on television. Yet while this program broke ratings records and was adored by the public, it seems that things weren’t as calm behind the scenes. “Being the Ricardos” is a biopic that attempts to present viewers with a detailed portrait of Ball, as well as the “I Love Lucy” on-set chaos.

Specifically, the film details one tumultuous week that impacts the lives of the show’s married stars Lucille Ball (Nicole Kidman) and Desi Arnaz (Javier Bardem). In between Ball’s usual bickering with cast members Vivian Vance (Nina Arianda) and William Frawley (J.K. Simmons),

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the pair must also address creative conflicts with series producer Jess Oppenheimer (Tony Hale) and writers Madelyn Pugh (Alia Shawkat) and Bob Carroll (Jake Lacy). As this is occurring, two major scandals arise. One report claims that Arnaz is cheating on Ball, while another asserts that the actress is a member of the Communist party.

As they discuss and deal with fallout from these articles, the leads also plan to announce Ball's pregnancy and plot to convince executives to make the real event a part of the fictional show.

There's certainly a lot of turmoil and positive and negative traits of both comedienne Lucille Ball and musician Desi Arnaz are displayed. Each of these performers have strong personalities and are unwilling to give up or compromise on their individual wants and needs. In fact, it's later explicitly stated by Ball that the show is actually an attempt to keep her marriage and family from splitting apart. As one might expect, many of their production ideas are ahead-of-their-time and some of the movie's best moments show how Ball and Arnaz deal with objections from executives and staff and push ahead with their own plans.

Of course, this stress also causes Ball to treat co-stars and the writers with more disdain than they deserve. This includes her attempts to manipulate Vivian Vance after the actress begins losing weight. The film isn't afraid to show its protagonists as fallible and occasionally cruel and that means that this is a meaty role for star Kidman. At times she does resemble Ball and effectively recreates the performer's raspy voice.

Bardem is also good as the friendly and charming, but somewhat distant, Arnaz.

Writer/director Aaron Sorkin ("The Trail of the Chicago 7") will also be familiar to many as the creator of the TV show "The West Wing." He is renowned for his sharp dialogue and there are zingers being thrown around. Sadly, fewer of them seem to hit the mark in this outing.

The cast and crew appear devoted to creating an authentic-looking version of the real individuals involved. However, all that attention to detail results in an unexpected stiffness in the drama. Additionally, some of the film's messages end up being delivered rather bluntly.

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Another bizarre decision is a series of interviews with the “I Love Lucy” staff in their 70s. This approach might have worked had footage of the real Oppenheimer, Pugh, and Carroll been used. Instead, actors John Rubinstein, Linda Lavin, and Ronny Cox play these roles, pretending to be reminiscing and talking frankly about their experiences with Ball and Arnaz on the studio backlot. It’s a strange and completely unnecessary addition to the story that adds a level of artifice to the proceedings.

In the end, “Being the Ricardos” is interesting and certainly highlights some of the tension and strife that existed during the production of “I Love Lucy” when the cameras weren’t rolling. Everything looks right and the movie has its moments, but there are definitely some oddities and flaws that result in a final product that doesn’t feel quite as engrossing as it should.

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