

Tom, Thanks for Overcoming Bachelor Party

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BACHELOR PARTY (1984)

Directed by Neal Israel

Written by Bob & Neal Israel

Starring Tawny Kitaen, Adrian Zmed, & Tom Hanks as Rick Gassko

Before this year, I'd never been to a bachelor party. Now, I've done two, and there's a third not far off, which will in fact be mine. There seems to be a season, in a young adult's life, where the expense of wedding-after-wedding hits like a tin can on pavement as it drags behind a Lincoln. I'm deep within this season, but luckily, none of my friends are especially bombastic or excess-minded. No, our idea of a rager is a tasteful cluster of Keiths' empties, centred on the kitchen island we're chatting around; and our idea of an raucous excursion is a cross-provincial day-trip in pursuit of a blindingly excellent plate of pasta. We're partiers, but the good kind.

I was drawn to visit TH's second-ever cinematic enterprise because I noticed it was about a bachelor party, and I just attended my friend Drew's bachelor party last Saturday. Little did I know the bash I experienced and the one in the film were similar the way ice cream and saw dust are similar. Everybody wants different things, which is a lesson that (if I'm being generous) 1984's Bachelor Party aims to relay; some folks dream of marriage, some covet their independence; some want to have their cake, some want to eat it too; and some enjoy a friendly get-together, while others want the night to offer the possibility of a mule overdosing on coke and pills, before being disposed of in an elevator.

There was a period for mainstream film where frivolity was celebrated in the name of reliable humour. After Scorsese, Kubrick, Lucas, etc. established what a thoughtful blockbuster could achieve, the subversive response was to make movies that are less substantial but equally entertaining. This began with National Lampoon productions, after which the foundation was laid for a long string of 80's & 90's sex comedies. Many of these are now known for not having aged well. Some have been altogether buried for that very reason. In the face of this being a good-natured log of appreciation for an artist I love, let me be clear: Bachelor Party is the most vile, tasteless, inexcusable movie I have ever seen. Full stop.

It came shortly after TH enjoyed a rare arrival of instant stardom. The man's never really had to play a supporting role, but you could argue Bachelor Party was early enough that he wasn't in a position to demand integrity. Regardless, he stars as Rick Gassko, a school bus driver who, upon announcing to his loutish buddies that he's getting married to Debbie (Tawny Kitaen), is made Guest of Honour at a hotel hootenanny, where debauchery and disloyalty are not only encouraged, they're expected. Debbie's father also counts on this deviance, so he enlists a supposedly nobler suitor to, excuse me, assassinate Rick? This is after they've unsuccessfully tried to buy Debbie for cash and kitchen appliances. But Rick outsmarts them and manages not to stray, which I guess makes him the hero, though only relatively speaking.

I needn't list every problematic detail in this film. In short, it's inherently sexist and predatory, also racist, transphobic, trivial toward mental illness, and unrepentantly unfunny. From a technical standpoint, it features noticeable stunt-doubles, an obviously drug-fuelled cast, and major logistical oversights (the sun comes up as Rick & Co. chase Debbie's kidnapper into a movie theatre, which is inexplicably crowded for 5AM). Bachelor Party deigns to suggest its own existence should be allowed, and that alone is a crime. And maybe this is a lesson for the whole genre, going forward. Our definitive bachelor party movie is The Hangover, and it's only taken a decade for that one to calcify in a goneby era (lots of F words, and not the good kind). So, it's not surprising a 35 year-old movie doesn't pass the 2019 woke-test, with a premise rooted in cliches about marriage's immasculating nature. But there's no way Bachelor Party was ever something to grin and bear. It's so bad, and they surely knew it. TH, to his credit, plays Rick like a real person, but I can't decide if that's even a good thing. I'm just thankful he overcame this low low bar.

As much as anything, I take umbridge with the insinuation that men are intrinsically heartless. It's conventions like this, as often expressed to be the norm, that contribute to the misunderstanding of maleness by males. In reality, my

guy friends and I hug each other and say 'I love you.' We're protective of our inner-circle, and thus, we're warm and welcoming toward each others' partners. And we inhabit some traditionally masculine behaviours, but we've deftly filtered out the stereotypes that a man doesn't require to substantiate his maleness. For example, when I saw my friends recently, there was plenty of standard ribbing aimed my way. But when I took hits from the boys, they were along the theme of Colin probably doesn't help out enough around the house. Honestly, it got under my skin because I like to think I'm pretty handy, but this kind of jab hardly sounds like the cracking of a whip.

If the bachelor party comedy is to survive, the intention needs to pivot to tell more stories about male friendships. Brotherhoods, the good kind. I promise these can still be R-rated and raunchy, but it only extends relatability to give it some heart. That's why Superbad is the good kind of male-driven party film, and why it out-lives The Hangover. It's also why Bachelor Party's been buried deep beneath years of better Hanks. Maybe I'm just making excuses for the fact that my friends and I are terminally boring partiers. Blissfully boring though, the good kind. Not that he would have, but my brother should not use this movie as a manual for how to throw me a pre-marriage soiree. It'll be more than enough to get us all around a kitchen island to trade snaps about how we can better be men; the good kind.

Thx!