



FILM: **MY OLD LADY**

FDG RATING: 3.5 ☺☺☺☺  
Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Israel Horovitz: *Director, writer*  
Maggie Smith: *Actress: Mathilde Girard*  
Kevin Kline: *Actor: Mathias Gold*  
Kristin Scott-Thomas: *Actress: Chloe Girard*

DATE: October 19 , 2014

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MY OLD LADY**

The title of the film, My Old Lady, is not a very endearing reference to 90 year old Mathilde Girard, the feisty main character. (Nor for the other matriarch, Mathias Gold's mother.) But the degrading term is well deserved by both women.

Who would suspect that Mathilde (another brilliant performance by Maggie Smith) has selfishly destroyed so many lives, including her daughter's, by having a very long, Parisian affair with Mathias' estranged father, Max. Mathias does not learn about the liaison until later in the film.

Promoted as a comedy, with a delightful, comedic trailer, our expectations were derailed as we learn that Mathias (Kevin Kline) has attempted suicide several time, is a recovering alcoholic, and emotionally and psychologically damaged as a result his father's estrangement and having witnessed his mother's suicide. We also see that although Mathilde's daughter, Chloe (Kristen Scott-Thomas) has devoted her life to her mother, the devotion was not reciprocated and not necessarily appreciated. Chloe's emotional scars are similar to those of Mathias. We soon see she has been having an affair with a married man, seemingly modeling her life after her mother's.

The odd situation that brings the characters together and allows Mathias and Chloe to learn their family secrets is a peculiar French real estate arrangement. The very desirable Paris apartment (willed to Mathias by his father who denied his son any other claim to his fortune) is inhabited by a "viager", (Mathilde) the apartment's previous owner who sold the apartment for a pittance to Max with the agreement that the new owner would pay a monthly fee and then inherit the apartment as soon as the viager dies. Mathilde has no intention of dying any time soon leaving financially strapped Mathias no way to immediately sell the apartment.

What we loved about the film was feeling like we were in a corner of Paris with quaint streets and gardens plus terrific performances by Kevin Kline, Maggie Smith, and Kristin Scott-Thomas; believable characters with obvious flaws. Most of our resident critics found the film entertaining and enjoyed the twists and turns. Some thought the story had a funny sweetness. But others were more critical of the disturbing adultery theme, the clichéd and contrived situations, the disjointed pacing, the implausible attraction of Chloe and Mathias, and the way the film manipulated our emotions (cleverly described by one of our critics as "an emotional joystick").

The message was very clear that everyone's actions (especially parents) can have far reaching ripple effects. Mathilde and Max ignored the damaging consequences their relationship had on their spouses and children. On the flip side, one charming ripple effect scene was when a woman was singing opera by the canal and Mathias impulsively joined in.

Expecting a light comedy, and then being prepared for a dark turn thinking Mathias may try to kill Mathilde to gain possession of the apartment, we were surprised and disappointed when the film became more of a tragedy camouflaged in comedy. A great cast, endearing cinematography of Paris, and the intriguing viager situation as a catalyst, couldn't compensate for the uncomfortable, unpleasant themes. A mixed bag of scores ranged from 2 to an enthusiastic 5 resulting in a combined group rating of 3.5 for This Old Lady.



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See you at the movies!

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