

When luck is not on your side

Daniel Burman's La suerte en tus manos comes across as overwhelmingly repetitious



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FILM REVIEW

When the same theme keeps cropping up — at an relentlessly steady pace — in an author's work, is it just revisiting the same old subject and staying true to a trademark peculiarity, or is it tantamount to an incapacity to outgrow the same old issues? In the case of screenwriter-director Daniel Burman, whose *Messiah* trilogy justifiably earned him critical accolades and positive public response, the issue in question boils down to identity crises of sundry kinds (community, paternal, filiation) and a young man's understandable need for approval.

In his latest production, the overhyped *La suerte en tus manos*, premiering today in Argentina, a young man's idiosyncrasy is at the core of the story. Once again, Burman writes a clearly identifiable alter ego as the male lead: Uriel, played by Oscar-winning Uruguayan singer-songwriter Jorge Drexler (début) with a healthy dose of charm that translates his musicmaking talent into a seamless blend of candour and unapologetic self-assurance. Kudos for Burman as casting director and kudos for Drexler, whose presence illuminates the screen to the point of turning the trite into affable, obliging spontaneity. Drexler gets under the skin of Uriel, a successful financial entrepreneur in his mid-to-late

30s, unable to settle down to the point of considering a vasectomy and actually having it performed lest his proclivity to short-lived affairs lead to unwanted paternity. He has an 11-year-old daughter, but that's where he has drawn the line. Oh, there's also 8-year-old Otto, who may have been the result of a moment's distraction in Uriel's amorous life.

But a vasectomy alone is not the solution if you want a human approach to relationships, like warning a potential partner or fiancée, "Hey, there's no procreation here, just *boudoir* fun." Not bad as the starting point for a situation comedy with a dramatic edge to it. Actually, it's a good excuse to get the action going. The ensuing situations may be predictable as they come, but, if well handled, entertainment and food for thought are served on the same plate.

At the opposite end of *La suerte en tus manos* is Gloria, played by the great stage and screen actress Valeria Bertucelli. Like Drexler, Bertucelli's face and demeanour alone suffice to fill the screen with a potent mixture of innocence and natural, unaffected ways. Gloria is an old flame of Uriel's, who dumped her for someone with less urgent aspirations. Yet, in Uriel's view it was Gloria who dumped him for unknown reasons. Be that as it may, Uriel has abandoned all pretense of a self-charted future — probably in the volatile music industry — for a more profitable, stable position in the world of finance. He is a successful broker and an unbeatable poker player, to boot. And yet, he's clearly afraid of approaching middle age, that stereotyped moment in life when men opt out Viagra pills for a red Porsche.

Travelling to the city of Rosario to have the vasectomy performed — keeping it a secret is a key issue for him — Uriel stays the night at a luxurious hotel which Gloria, as chance would have it, has also chosen for a reunion with her mother (Norma Aleandro). From this point on — and this is not meant as a scathing remark — everything is predictable, as is normally the case with good comedy. The old scheme boy-meets-girl (chances on old flame), boy-loses-girl (refuses to take another chance), boy-gets-girl-back (decides to take a dive) is certainly unavoidable and what audiences rightly expect from this kind of product.

In *La suerte en tus manos*, however, the string of comedy situations interspersed with moments of quiet or funny reflection are sloppily handled, even if, presumably, the screenplay was chockfull of promises of a perfectly choreographed and executed feel-good story. Good will permitting — massive amounts of it — you may try to dig deeper into the theme of *La suerte en tus manos*. You may argue it goes well beyond the restricted subject of identity, human fear of emotional bonding and commitment, the works. It may also be argued that chance — the way we mere mortals know it and the way better equipped Rabbis understand it through thorough study of the Torah — plays heavily on the storyline of *La suerte en tus manos*.

However, revising Mr. Burman's filmography, it may well be the case that, under a different format, he's treading on safe, familiar territory. This may be comfortable for himself as writer and director, but a dud for audiences who've seen his previous movies. Which is very likely the case with filmgoers who run to watch "the new Burman." Will they find something new, or at least something fresh by way of story and genre treatment? Doubtful. When it comes to box office, though, *La suerte en tus manos* is likely to do rather well, provided the right demographics turn to this formulaic dramedy.

PRODUCTION NOTES

La suerte en tus manos (All In). Argentina / Spain, 2012. Written by: Daniel Burman, Sergio Dubcovsky. Directed by: Jorge Drexler, Valeria Bertuccelli, Norma Aleandro, Luis Brandoni, Gabriel Schultz, Silvina Bosco, Salo Pasik. NC13. Running time: 90 minutes.