



Nick Prescott's Reviews

Razzle Dazzle

Talent: Kerry Armstrong, Ben Miller, Nadine Garner, Jane Hall, Denise Roberts, Barry Crocker, Toni Lamond, and numerous talented young dancers.

Date of review: Thursday the 22nd of March, 2007

Director: Darren Ashton

Duration: 92 minutes

Classification: PG

We rate it: 3½ stars.

Darren Ashton, whose first feature was the quite-well-received Aussie road movie *Thunderstruck*, has, for his follow-up, entered “mockumentary” territory with an amusing, cringe-inducing and very well performed look at youthful dance competitors and their horrible stage parents. *Razzle Dazzle* is a documentary-style comedy in the tradition of *A Mighty Wind*, *Confetti* and *Best in Show*, and like those films, if you can bear to spend time in the company of the truly awful people being caricatured, *Razzle Dazzle* is a lot of fun to behold.

Kerry Armstrong, here making a conscious departure from her recent dramatic roles, plays Justine, a vacuous, chardonnay-sipping ex-dancer whose pride and joy is not so much her daughter as her daughter’s dancing prowess. Justine is the archetypal stage-mother from hell, a woman whose own insecurities are so clearly repressed and unacknowledged that she pushes her child into situation after situation designed to demonstrate the youngster’s skill and beauty, while taking credit for everything herself. Whenever things don’t go as planned, Justine resorts to a selection of deeply embarrassing strategies including bribing competition officials, planting seeds of doubt in other parents’ minds, and undermining the dance-troupe’s instructor, Mister Jonathan (Ben Miller). Through all of this the kids themselves have as much fun as they can, and attempt to enjoy the dancing in spite of the machinations of the adults.

As Christopher Guest has demonstrated in his films (which include the aforementioned *A Mighty Wind* and *Best in Show*), taking satirical pot-shots at

pompous, idiotic and horrible people can be as funny as it is uncomfortable. There is a similar mix of discomfort and hilarity in *Razzle Dazzle*; while much of the film's portrait of middle-class Australia is truly appalling, much of it is truly funny. When the frustrated Barbara (Denise Roberts) resorts to kidnapping a talented child dancer in order to vicariously participate in the competition, the results are both distressing and genuinely amusing. Similar examples populate the film, and their results are as equally frightening and funny.

Razzle Dazzle shows a talented cast being put through its paces by an observant and generous director, and while the film does have its slow spots, for the most part it hits the right (slightly discordant and deliberately grating) note.

Nick Prescott