



Nick Prescott's Reviews

Four Holidays

Talent: Reese Witherspoon, Vince Vaughan, Jon Favreau, Robert Duvall, Mary Steenburgen, Sissy Spacek, Jon Voight.

Date of review: Thursday 4th December, 2008

Director: Seth Gordon

Duration: 82 minutes

Classification: M

We rate it: 2 stars.

There are a number of semi-intriguing things about this film, and possibly a greater number of not-so-intriguing elements that manage to tip the scales to take it from being potentially interesting to really rather nondescript and forgettable. The first faintly intriguing thing about *Four Holidays* is its title, which has been changed for we Australians. The film's US title is *Four Christmases*, and Santa only knows why the title was changed for its Antipodean audience. Perhaps we're regarded as a more secular nation than the US of A? Who knows. What we want to know here is whether or not it's a decent film, and the answer, in my opinion, is "Well, sort of."

Four Holidays starts quite well, with Vince Vaughan and Reese Witherspoon (both interesting and capable actors) seemingly meeting each other for the first time in a San Francisco bar and having a passionate argument that turns into a passionate tryst in the bar's toilet. It becomes clear that this humorous episode has been staged by the couple (who are in fact established, long-term partners) in order to keep some spice in their relationship. Reese and Vince (here playing semi-yuppies Kate and Brad, respectively) are an idiosyncratic couple, successful, financially independent and not at all interested in doing the usual round of family-home-to-family-home Christmas runabout during the holidays. They'd rather escape on their own and be themselves, and year in and year out they tell their respective families that they're off doing charity work when in fact they're relaxing on an exotic beach somewhere.

This time around, the San Fran airport is fogged in, and the two lovers are caught by a news camera while standing at the airline counter, and are forced to confront their relatives and spend Christmas at home, going through the detested awkwardness of being reunited with long-out-of-touch siblings, having to beg each other's pardon for the odd habits of their respective families, having to deal with skeletons that are forcibly dragged out of closets, and so on. *Four Holidays* is really a comedy of the uncomfortable, with a dash of romance stirred in, and it's held together by two likeable enough central performers working with the most astonishingly star-studded

supporting cast one could imagine. This is all made even stranger by the featherweight material these skilled performers are working with.

Director Seth Gordon is here working with an A-list cast and, sadly, B- or C-list writing. The fact that the wonderful Robert Duvall plays a redneck loser who's on screen for a total of perhaps three minutes gives you some idea of how strangely Gordon has used his cast. Sissy Spacek is used in a very similar way; she appears in one scene, steals it completely, and then retreats into the background. It's a very odd approach to take for this sort of film, and as mentioned before, the writing is quite lacklustre. Just when the audience thinks things are about to explode into genuine hilarity, more often than not the scene in question fizzles out in a rather forgettable way.

What *Four Holidays* really wants to be is an anti-Christmas movie, a comedy that takes the proverbial out of the run-around that characterises the silly season for many of us. For those wanting undemanding holiday chuckles with the odd bit of gross-out humour thrown in, *Four Holidays* may well fit the bill, but I can guarantee the film won't linger in the system for as long as the Christmas pudding will.

Nick Prescott