

Entertainment

GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST

While attending his brother’s wedding, a confirmed bachelor and habitual woman-izer ends up haunted by ghosts determined to show him the error of his ways. Romantic Comedy/PG-13.

Fashion photographer Connor Mead (Matthew McConaughey) is at the top of his game. While his assistant, Melanie (Noureen DeWulf), handles his scheduling and business affairs, he usually ends up bedding his lingerie models, following the

advice of his late Uncle Wayne (Michael Douglas) in terms of getting women in bed but never committing to any of them.

Accordingly, he really isn’t in favor of his younger brother, Paul (Brecking Meyer), marrying Sandra (Lacey Chabert), but agrees to be the best man at their wedding. Besides, it allows him to see the various bridesmaids, all but one of which he’s previously bedded. That includes Jenny Perotti (Jennifer Garner), a physician and the only woman who nearly got him by the heart after knowing each other since they were kids.

She isn’t crazy to see Connor, which also holds true for Sandra’s father, Sergeant Volkom (Robert Foster), a Korean War vet who will be officiating at the ceremony. But that also means his sexy ex-wife, Vondra (Anne Archer), will be in attendance, much to the delight of Connor.

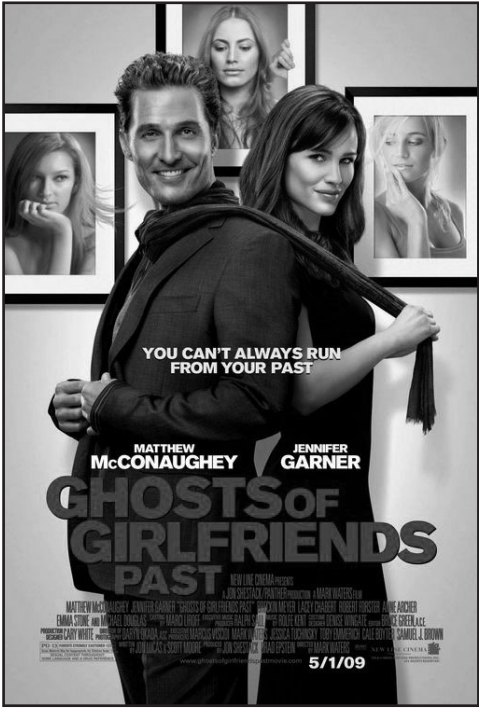
He’s less thrilled, however, and actually quite shocked, to have an encounter with Uncle Wayne who informs him that he’ll be visited by three other ghosts -- from Connor’s past, present and future -- who will show him the error of his woman-izing ways. Connor thinks his uncle is an alcohol-fueled hallucination until he finds Allison Vandermeersh (Emma Stone) in his bed. She’s the teenager to whom he lost his virginity, and she takes him on a tour of his past behavior, while Mel does the same for his present, and another Ghost (Olga Maliouk) does the future bit.

As he contends with that, he must also deal with his resurrected feelings for Jenny who wants little to do with him, especially considering the presence of the handsome and debonair Brad (Daniel Sunjata) who’s been flown in by the bride for Jenny’s enjoyment.

Our Take: 3 out of 10
It’s been 166 years since Charles Dickens wrote “A Christmas Carol,” the classic tale of a miserable man who gets his outlook on life rebooted, if you will, by visits from three ghosts. Those from the past, present and future show him the errors of his ways including the damage he’s done and the potential ultimate results of his behavior.

In the intervening century and a half plus, others have used that story as a template for telling similar tales, and with each one, you have to wonder about Dickens’ reaction. Is he looking down and smiling at what he inspired (and perhaps gloating a bit over his legacy continuing on for so long) or, as they like to say, is he spinning in his grave over the injustice and/or bastardization done to his work?

Considering how “Ghosts of Girlfriends Past” plays out, I’m guessing it’s probably the latter. Yet another film where Matthew McConaughey embodies a “player” who’s loath to settle down, this rip-off of “Christmas Carol” retrofits it as a wake-up call for a womanizer like Connor Mead. While the film might play okay to less-discerning



viewers and offers a smattering of laughs, it generally has a dim view of women (despite the player getting his comeup-pance), has a fairly shoddy construction, and generally doesn’t make you care one iota about the lothario for good or bad.

McConaughey plays a famous photographer best known for shooting fashion models in next to nothing before bedding and then immediately casting them off to move on to his next conquest. While

there was one girl (Jennifer Garner as the adult version) who entranced him for years, he similarly bedded and discarded her off like the rest, following the rules laid out before him by his similarly minded mentor uncle (Michael Douglas).

But the latter has returned -- from beyond the grave, no less -- to warn his nephew to change his ways or else, and states that he’ll be visited by three ghosts (sound familiar?). And this just so happens to occur the night before his younger brother (Breckin Meyer) is getting married (to Lacey Chabert) and where Connor has previously bedded all but one of the bridesmaids including, natch, the one played by Garner.

That’s followed by those three personal tour guide spirits (Emma Stone, Noureen DeWulf and Olga Maliouk) taking him through the standard motions of the tale, his eyes are opened, and he then races to fix everything he’s screwed up, including the wedding as well as his on-again, off-again involvement with Jenny.

While clearly not original any way one looks at it, the material does have some potential, however limited it might be. Alas, helmer Mark Waters -- whose directing efforts have been hit or miss affairs and works here from a script by Jon Lucas and Scott Moore who helped pen the similarly awful “Four Christmases” -- simply can’t do much of anything to make us care or even just entertain viewers.

The comedy often feels forced and the timing off, with the story sort of meandering about within the confines of its pre-built parameters. And none of it shines whether in flashbacks (that take up the bulk of the supernatural material where present-day Connor gets to see his younger self fail with girls, be tutored by his uncle, and then transform into a player), a brief, out of body present day view of his effects on the heartbroken, or an even briefer future look at his obviously lonely demise.

McConaughey does his usual stuff (albeit only once appearing shirtless by my count) and if you’ve liked that in the past, you’ll likely have the same reaction to his work here (although the charmed that’s carried him before is running dry). Garner is completely wasted, while Breckin Meyer and Lacey Chabert don’t contribute much worth noting (enough with the hysterical bride shtick already).

Douglas comes off like he’s slumming it here (although you still have to love that smooth vocal delivery), and the ladies playing the spirits can’t do much with their parts. Even considering the “Christmas Carol” trajectory, there’s never any doubt about how things will play out, thus making the overall experience even more of a chore to sit through. “Ghosts of Girlfriends Past” rates as a 3 out of 10. Courtesy of Screenit.com •

Council

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System (PERS) subsidies and Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) liabilities. Mayor Kelly McDowell commented that the recession that his sister termed “the great correction” is “affecting El Segundo and will continue to do so” as the Council considers how it will frame the next fiscal year budget. That document is scheduled for adoption on September 15, two weeks after a public hearing on the matter. Prior to that, City department heads will meet during the first two weeks of June to go over budget details. The finance department will draft a preliminary document the following week that will be discussed in detail at the Council’s next strategic planning session on July 8.

Council Tweaks Downtown Parking Fee Program

Hoping to revive its struggling downtown in-lieu parking program, the Council last week approved a move to allow business and property owners to pay for required in-lieu parking spaces over a 20-year period instead of in one lump sum. Under the arrangement, the City will hold a lien against the property in question and issue a deed of trust similar to a mortgage--complete with interest terms based on the City’s average rate of investment return.

Through the existing in-lieu program, the City collects monies (\$17,500 per space) from downtown property owners who expand or build additional stories to their buildings but are unable to provide required on-site parking for future tenants. One may either provide parking on-site or pay a fee “in lieu” of it so the City can apply the funds towards public parking and perhaps use those monies to one day build another parking structure downtown. The in-lieu fee does not mean property owners purchase or lease an actual parking space.

City officials originally hoped the program would spur downtown expansion and development. But since the inception in 2003, the City has only received fees for 14 in-lieu spaces, according to Councilmember Bill Fisher who is part of a downtown parking subcommittee with colleague Mayor Pro Tem Eric Busch. Fisher said a number of downtown property owners told him they would remodel or improve their buildings if they could pay the in-lieu fees over time.

Busch reported that business owners felt the \$17,500 was “too expensive” even though it would actually cost them even more to provide their own on-site parking. “One thought was can we extend that payment over time similar to a home mortgage and amortize it over time,” said Busch.

The Council also discussed a second option for downtown businesses that will allow restaurants and retailers to temporarily expand their operations without purchasing in-lieu spaces. Those wishing to provide outdoor dining or special event sidewalk

sales (set up underneath awnings, canopies, tents, umbrellas or other easy-to-remove coverings) can do so if they lease spaces in the downtown parking garage.

Under the proposal, retailers can hold special outdoor sales up to 30 days per year. Restaurants have no such limitations and can have outdoor dining based on the lease term for the parking space(s) in question. Currently, there are about 50 available spaces in the garage. This item is set for second reading and adoption on June 2.

New Commission, Board, Committee Appointees

Mayor McDowell announced new appointees for several key positions on local commissions, boards and committees after the Council interviewed a number of candidates before the Council meeting. The selections:

Recreation and Parks Commission: Debbie Bundy and Joe Caravello (full term, expiring May 30, 2013)

Planning Commission: Marie Felhauer (re-appointed to full term, expiring June 30, 2013)

Senior Citizens Housing Corporation Board: Carol Wingate and John Nisley (full term, expiring June 30, 2013)

Environmental Committee: Daniel Barbee (full term, expiring June 30, 2013).

A spot on the Library Board of Trustees remains vacant as no volunteers came forward for interviews.

Sue Carter Recognized as South Bay Woman of the Year

Also last Wednesday, long-time El Segundo resident Sue Carter received a Council proclamation in honor of her recent recognition as South Bay Woman of the Year by Torrance-based special education school the Switzer Learning Center. Among the list of her accomplishments as cited by Mayor McDowell, Carter has been President of the Friends of the El Segundo Public Library for 19 years and is founder of that organization’s historical committee. That committee acquires, digitally scans and organizes archival photos of El Segundo, high school yearbook and various clippings, while also assisting class reunion groups and local businesses in photo selections.

Early in her volunteer career, Carter spearheaded a “Funds for Furnishings” campaign and secured \$68,000 in donations from both corporate sponsors and private citizens to complete furnishings for various rooms during the Library expansion project. Over the years, she has also helped the Friends supply over \$100,000 in books to the four local school libraries and helped build a core collection of 16,000 books in 2001 via the “Bucks for Books” campaign for the renovated Richmond Street Elementary School. Carter also headed a fundraising project to replace the salt water aquarium in the children’s area of the Library. •

Frankly

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Well, Diva Danica didn’t win the Indy 500, but she finished a respectable third. And had about 100 of her commercials broadcast on the old tube during the four-hour TV show. Tax problem guy and *Dancing With the Stars*’ contestant Helio Castroneves won the race, for the third time, I believe.

And finally, is your life so interesting that you actually got up early on Memorial Day and watched the L.A. Marathon? Wonder if the actor portraying “The Most Interesting Man in the World” was too hung over to watch? Did you see me running in the race? Just wondering...•

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