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FILM REVIEWS

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Still Mine is moving but never preachy

Film avoids large statements in discussing love, age and death
Published May 9, 2013 by Mark Teo in Film Reviews

Even if it's powered by *Babe's* James Cromwell and striking Can-film darling Geneviève Bujold, it can't be easy to make a film about aging. For one, there's next to no cheap thrill factor. With time, high cheekbones sink. Rapid-fire wit slows. And for the elderly, death isn't glamorous — it's an ever-present reality. Thankfully, *Still Mine* plays its cards right; it approaches old age with just the right amounts of gravity and grace, and as a result, it never sags under its weighty subject matter.



STILL MINE

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To director Michael McGowan's credit, *Still Mine* fires its emotional ammo quick, early and often. Opening in a courtroom, 87-year-old farmer Craig (the 73-year-old Cromwell) is building a new home for his wife Irene (the 70-year-old Bujold), who, thanks to her advanced age and slow-simmering dementia, can't handle the maintenance of the couple's familial farmhouse. The only problem? Craig, whose family comes from a ship-building tradition, doesn't have a building permit, and is being thwarted by the province's bureaucratic red tape.

Here's where the double entendre comes into play. Part of Craig's quest to build a house is personal, meaning that he wants to demonstrate that he's still capable of erecting a functional house. It's a statement that, even as an octogenarian, his destiny is still his. (At one point, he jokingly says that he plans to beat the odds of death.) On the other hand, the project is a testament to his understated dedication to Irene. She doesn't want to enter a nursing home, and he wants to honour her wish — entering a seniors home, they say, is akin to calling a hearse. Even though he recognizes Irene less and less (and vice versa), it's Craig's way of declaring that he still takes responsibility for their relationship. She, as it were, is still his.

Still Mine isn't driven by any pressing conflict, even if the couple's characters are played off as the film's conscience, at turns supporting and questioning Craig's actions. Rather, it's almost entirely built around Cromwell and Bujold's powerfully compelling performances. Both play their roles with a steady hand. Craig's devotion often reveals itself as stubbornness, and when he lashes out at his wife's inability to perform basic tasks, it doesn't feel mean — it feels human. Bujold, for her part, anchors the film, and her performance as a woman losing her grip on reality is delivered wonderfully, meaning she neither panders nor overacts.

The result? *Still Mine* is deeply moving, and it achieves its proper effect without making any large statements. Frankly, it's refreshing that the film — which overtly explores death — doesn't land on any philosophical or religious touch points. It treats death as an open-ended question, and with that, comes terror, freedom and myriad mixed emotions. Indeed, the film doesn't feel preachy. It feels authentic, and that's a massive credit to *Still Mine*.



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