

FILM

Our Family Wedding surpasses stereotype

Running time: 101 minutes
Rated: PG-13 for some sexual content and brief strong language

★☆☆☆

LOS ANGELES: One enters a movie like *Our Family Wedding* bracing for cheesiness.

As a genre, wedding films are typically about as cloying as two-hours worth of kitten videos on YouTube. Add in the equally checked history of stridently ethnic movies, and you might want to start asking moviegoers to remove their belts before entering the theater.

But as Rick Famuyiwa's "Our Family Wedding" - which combines both elements - moves along, the fingers in front of one's eyes (usually a shield reserved for horror films) slowly part. The realization dawns that Famuyiwa has made a mostly charming movie despite its cliché milieu.

The performances help.

And the center is America Ferrara (as Lucia) and Lance Gross (as Marcus), a young couple in college in New York who return home to their families in Los Angeles to break the news that they're engaged.

Neither family - one Latino, the other black - much likes the decision. Lucia's father, Brad Boyd (Forest Whitaker), and Marcus' dad, Miguel Ramirez (Carlos Mencia), quickly become rivals.

To be sure, there are plenty of predictable jokes reliant on stereotypes. But *Our Family Wedding* often smacks of real people.

As the families feud, they use racial stereotypes less as a crutch for identity than a means for sarcasm, self-deprecation and - if at

all possible - ammo against their potential new in-laws.

Insisting that the wedding also include African-American traditions, Whitaker temporarily draws a blank before remembering the custom of the bride and groom jumping over a broom stick.

Whitaker's Brad is a radio D-J and an aging playboy. Mencia's Miguel is - as all fathers of the bride are in movies - overprotective. Though both are somewhat outlandish, neither sinks to cartoon level - always a threat for the comic Mencia.

A number of characters hover on the outside: Regina King as a longtime family friend; Lupe Ontiveros as an over-the-top, conservative grandmother; Anjelah Johnson as Lucia's droll sister; Diana Maria Riva as Lucia's mother.

As friends of the groom, Charlie Murphy and Taye Diggs make a brief, funny appearance for an argument over marriage as either "sex on the regular" or "marital Guantanamo."

Unfortunately, "Our Family Wedding" loses its balance around the time the goat gets loose and eats a bunch of Viagra. Still, though cheesiness is all around, it never quite penetrates "Our Family Wedding."

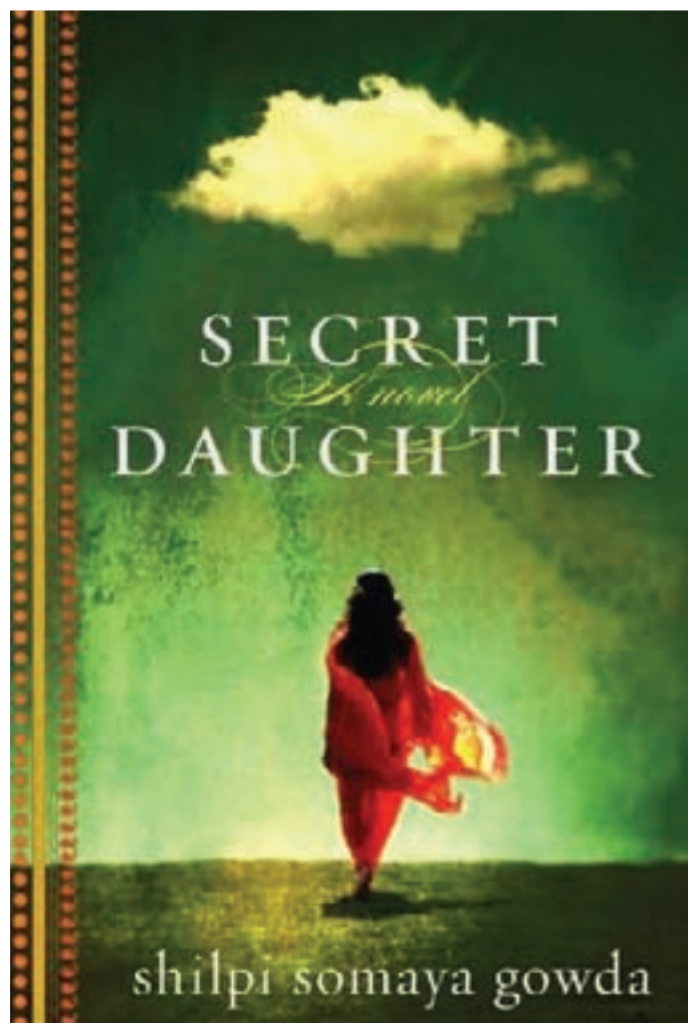
Famuyiwa (who directed *Brown Sugar* and *The Wood*) opens the film in a way coincidentally similar to the recent romantic comedy *Valentine's Day: A D-J* (Whitaker) spins a tune dedicated to lovers on Valentine's Day. *Our Family Wedding* is significantly better than that utterly artificial film. It's not as overstuffed, it has authentic quiet moments and it has better music, too: Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings kick off a soundtrack of Daptone soul. -AP



FILE - Still scene from the movie *Our Family Wedding*

BOOKS

Author writes about loss, family in India and US



FILE - Front cover of the book *Secret Daughter*

Title: Secret Daughter
Author: by Shilpi Somaya Gowda
Publisher: William Morrow

NEWYORK: Sometimes the image in our minds of what we have lost is far greater than the loss itself, and so it is for Asha, who was given up for adoption by her birthparents in India.

Boys are the prized possession in the Indian village where Kavita Merchant gives birth to a daughter. She loves this child and cannot bear to have her husband, Jasu, leave her to die, as he did with their first girl. In secret, she names her Usha, or dawn, and painstakingly makes her way from her village to then-Bombay when the baby is just days old. She leaves the child at an orphanage, and every day for the rest of her life, she lives with the pain of her decision. But for Kavita, it was the only way to save the girl.

The child is renamed Asha, meaning hope, and adopted by a couple - an Indian man and his American wife - who live in California. Krishnan and Somer Thakkar are both doctors. Slowly, Somer begins to realize what it means to be a mother, about the small and large sacrifices. But her child doesn't look like her, and Somer worries that she will one day lose Asha to her native land. The relationship between the couple begins to unravel as Somer refuses to accept the Indian culture, rarely visiting her husband's family. This also strains her relationship with Asha.

Kavita, on the other hand, gives birth to a son, Vijay, and is thus able to keep him. Jasu persuades her to move to Mumbai, where they can try to pursue a better life. But they are met instead by the squalor of the Dharavi slums.

Shilpi Somaya Gowda's flair for detail is evident in the way she describes the clothes, food, the streets and their smells of this land teeming with people and poverty in "Secret Daughter." This story about motherhood, loss, family and forgiveness is authentic in every way. The reader need not be a mother to feel Kavita's pain. The prose is so achingly touching, it draws the reader in with every description and emotion of the characters. Gowda shows how Kavita goes hungry so her husband and son can eat.

"Kavita steps outside to make chai in the dead embers of last night's fire. There is some leftover khichdi from dinner, which she divides into two portions, one each for Jasu and Vijay."

Through hard work, Kavita and Jasu manage to leave the slums. But it is Vijay, who becomes embroiled in illegal dealings as a young man, that brings them more money. He moves them into a bigger apartment, allowing them to have little luxuries like a taxi ride home from an evening out. But his presence in their lives also diminishes, and the authorities are after him. -AP

FASHION

Paris waxes retro with Kenzo collections

PARIS: Paris pulsed with retro energy on Monday, as the French capital's fall-winter 2010-11 ready-to-wear shows moved into day six with Giambattista Valli's feather-light display of 1960s elegance and a boho chic '70s collection from Kenzo.

Yves Saint Laurent designer Stefano Pilati was also channeling a bit of a seventies vibe, though he subjugated it to a stark, almost Puritanical aesthetic, topping off razor-cut black skirt suits with starched Pilgrim collars and nunish bonnets.

Valli - an Italian whose sophisticated, ladylike designs have won him dedicated followers among the international jet set - delivered a collection of trapeze dresses and drop-waisted cocktail dresses in a frothy patchwork of sheer silks, fabric petals, tulle and furs.

Kenzo's genial Italian designer, Antonio Marras, also looked toward a bygone era, reveling in the free, bohemian spirit of the seventies - when the 40-year-old label was founded. The collection of long light dresses and voluminous sweaters could not have been cooler if it tried, (which of course it wouldn't because trying is, by definition, uncool.)

French heritage label Leonard also raided its archive, sending out kaftans and little A-line dresses in a New Age-y, seventies feather print with suede appliques.

Yves Saint Laurent

What is it about the Pilgrim aesthetic that Pilati finds so beguiling?

The Italian designer sent out structured black skirt suits hung with the wide round collars, or stranger yet, exaggerated epaulettes in clear plastic, like what raincoats are made from.

A white poplin peasant shirt was paired with a high-waisted black skirt and round black collar with dangling plastic flaps. Another black pencil skirt and ample poplin shirt was worn with a multitiered black bonnet like those worn by certain orders of Catholic nuns.

Odder still, many of these rigorous, almost ascetic looks were worn with massive gold chains and dangling cutouts of people in profile.

It was an unsettling but not entirely unappealing performance by Pilati, whose uncompromising aesthetic has won him flocks of devoted followers though his recent collections have garnered mixed reviews.

Even among the A-list guests at Monday's show, held beneath the lofty glass-and-steel ceiling of the Grand Palais, reaction was divided.

Porno-chic photographer Terry Richardson pronounced the collection "beautiful - super sexy and chic."

"I think Yves would be happy," he told The Associated Press in a post-show interview, referring to the label's founder, who died in 2008 at age 71. But, in the interest of full disclosure, Richardson added "I have to say that I'm a fan of a big floppy hat, always. It kills me, it's always amazing."

Maria Shriver, on the other hand, was less convinced by the exercise.

The first lady of California and wife of Arnold Schwarzenegger said "I'm not sure where I would wear that."

"It's not really my lifestyle," she told The AP from her front row perch, adding "I'm definitely not a fashion connoisseur, though. It all looked very high fashion to me."

Other celebrity guests at the show included longtime YSL customer and

the label's one-time muse, French actress Catherine Deneuve, and Australian pop singer Kylie Minogue, who braved the frigid temperatures and icy winds in a silk blouse, a pair of high-waisted leather shorts and fishnet stockings - signed YSL, naturellement.

Kenzo

A bohemian spirit infused Kenzo, as designer Marras looked back to the early '70s, when the label was founded, serving up long, light gypsy dresses paired with boxy menswear staples.

Marras delivered jumpers in oversized floral prints, vests that glistened with embroidered mirror-work, fur accents and maxi-sweater coats in the madcap stripes and polka-dot knits that have come to define the Paris-based label's patchwork

aesthetic. Airy dresses in sheer flower prints, with low waists and long flowing skirts, were worn with boxy pinstriped boyfriend blazers.

And because it was a winter collection, the looks were layered with printed scarves and crazy, cozy knitted scarves and shrugs - items the brand consistently excels at.

Models, decked out in oversized shades and fedora hats, ate up the catwalk with long, swinging strides of their extra-tall platform boots. They wove in and out of the set of wooden poles hung with tangles of raffia as a soundtrack of Rolling Stones and Neil Young songs boomed overhead.

The sober palette of plums, dusty browns, teals and grays, was pure 1970s chic, in homage to the era when the

brand - which is celebrating its fortieth anniversary this year - was founded.

Marras, an Italian who also has his own signature line, said he was inspired not only by the aesthetic of the period, but also by its reigning spirit of freedom.

"This is about fashion with no limits, with inspiration coming from all different themes," Marras told reporters backstage. "It's the idea of fashion as a melting pot, which is the style that Kenzo was the first one to create," he said, referring to the label's founder, the Japanese-born Kenzo Takada. Highlights of the ravishing collection included a vest heavy with silver flower appliques, a boxy blazer with sleeves in sparkling leopard print and an ankle-length tent dress in blood orange flower print.

If this is freedom, give us more! -AP



Models wear creations by Italian fashion designer Antonio Marras for Kenzo, as part of his Fall-Winter 2010-2011 ready-to-wear fashion collection presented in Paris, Monday, March 8, 2010. (AP)



Models present creations by Italian designer Stephano Pilati for Yves Saint Laurent as part of his Fall-Winter ready-to-wear fashion collection 2010 - 2011, presented in Paris, Monday, March 8, 2010. (AP)

