



The Bridesmaids Effect

Hollywood's latest affair with funny flicks for chicks

WORDS BY RACHAEL SCOTT

The Bridesmaids Effect has taken hold of Hollywood with as firm a grip as Kim Kardashian on a financially lucrative wedding. Until Kristen Wiig and her BFFs burped and farted their way onto our screens, studio executives were reluctant to green light female-driven comedies, unless they involved Jennifer Aniston bagging a boyfriend or Angelina Jolie kicking butt. Now there's a veritable feast of female friendly films and TV productions coming our way.

For reasons best known to the men in grey, the film industry has long been convinced that the only people who go to the cinema are eighteen to twenty-five-year-old males who appreciate nothing other than testosterone charged extravaganzas filled with action, sex and violence. This is not only stupid, but also insulting. Box office figures for *Bridesmaids* (\$288m worldwide) proved it wasn't just women who found the sight of Maya Rudolph defecating in the middle of the street in her wedding dress hilarious, but blokes did as well. Producers suddenly had an epiphany. Women could be funny too! Who knew?

Channel Four is first in line, in bringing us the new wave of femme-friendly comedies coming out of the US. Already airing is our favourite manic pixie dream girl Zooey Deschanel in *New Girl* as Jess who, after discovering her dunderheaded boyfriend is a cheat, moves into a flat with three guys. There's a convincing chemistry between the four, as the whimsically weird Jess bestows life lessons on her lovable man-children.

Four has also purchased *Whitney* and *2 Broke Girls*. Stand up comic Whitney Cummings' eponymous comedy tackles classic battle of the sexes dilemmas. She also wrote *2 Broke Girls*, along with Michael Patrick King (the man behind *Sex And The City*), which is based on an unlikely friendship that develops between Max, Kat Dennings' street smart waitress, and down on her luck ex-socialite Caroline, played by Beth Behrs, as they struggle to build a cupcake business. Both draw heavily from *Friends* and follow a traditional sitcom format with laughter on cue, but have decidedly bawdy dialogue that might raise some eyebrows.

It's unlikely any of these ladies will last as long as Rachel et al, but writer-director Lena Dunham could go the distance. *Girls*, in which Dunham stars, follows a group of twenty-something women struggling with life in the Big Apple. Airing on HBO in April, it's already being compared to *Sex And The City*, but if the droll, self-deprecating humour of Dunham's *Tiny Furniture* is anything to go by, *Girls* will be a very different sitcom.

Hollywood honchos are also going ahead with a »

smorgasbord of R-rated funny flicks for chicks on the scuffed high heels of *Bridesmaids*. *New Girl* creator Liz Meriwether's script *Honey Pot*, has been picked up by Paramount and is described as "an action comedy about what happens when a bunch of hot funny women get their *Bourne* on." Natalie Portman has set up production company Handsomecharlie Films to promote women's comedies. She told *Vogue*, "We're very into female comedies; there just aren't enough. We're trying to go for that guy-movie tone, but with women – who are generally not allowed to be beautiful and funny, and certainly not vulgar." The actress has started development on *Best Buds*, the story of two best friends who take a road trip to their friend's wedding to give her some pot.

Leading the pack at this year's Sundance, was all-girl ensemble *Bachelorette* starring Kirsten Dunst, Isla Fisher and Lizzy Caplan as three bitchy, coke-snorting friends who are horrified when they discover that old school pal 'Pig Face' is getting married before they are. Directed by Leslye Headland and adapted from her play, reviews have praised its humour, but criticised its uneven tone. The audience will no doubt view it as an unofficial sequel to *Bridesmaids*



HEN'S FISHER, DUNST & CAPLAN



FOR A GOOD TIME, CALL...



KRISTEN WIGG LEADS IN IMOGENE

and go and see it anyway.

Also at Sundance was phone-sex comedy *For A Good Time, Call...* When Lauren Miller and Katie Anne Naylon wrote their script two years ago, they were told that R-rated female comedies don't work. Now it's a different story. Cynical Anne Heche and hopeless romantic Marcia DeBonis are unlucky in love best friends DeeDee and Bebe, in the hysterically looking *That's What She Said*. Admittedly, even the

trailer was unappealing for this one, but *Celeste And Jesse Forever* looks more promising, as *I Love You, Man*'s Rashida Jones stars as half of a couple desperately trying to stay friends after breaking up.

Kristen Wigg has centre stage in *Imogene* as a playwright who tries to win back her lover by faking a suicide, and is then put in the custody of her gambling addicted mother played by Annette Bening; and Melissa McCarthy's long-gestating script *Tammy*, about a woman who goes on a road trip with her potty-mouthed granny,

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now has a director on board. Also in production is *Very Good Girls*, with Dakota Fanning and Elizabeth Olsen as two high school graduates determined to lose their virginity over the summer.

So why has it taken the studios so long to realise that rude women equals wonga? Despite both of the *Sex And The City* films accumulating over \$700 million at the box office, and *Mamma Mia* being the most successful British-made film of all time, both received lukewarm reactions from the majority of the press, and many of those reviews were laced with derisive jibes. "There are four of them – banded together, like hormonal hobbits, and all obsessed with a ring," wrote *The New Yorker's* Anthony Lane on *Sex And The City*. Whether you consider these films worthy of critical acclaim or not, they're no less mindless than their male-targeted equivalents, such as the countless comic-book superhero duds littering the multiplexes every summer.

And while we're talking about the over-riding tone of condescension surrounding films aimed at women from the, mostly male-dominated, critical world, let's not forget the \$2.5 billion grossing phenomenon aimed directly at female tweeners – *Twilight*. Taylor Lautner might get a panning for his frequently bare-chested appearances as much as Carrie and Co. did for their shallow materialism, but critics and audiences alike possess an unprecedented hatred for the franchise. Can anyone please explain to me how a story about a love struck girl emotionally torn between a vampire and a werewolf is any less ridiculous than hobbits and elves squabbling over a ring?

While successful women's comedies come along every once in a while, they're usually one offs. Let's hope the *Bridesmaids* honeymoon period develops into a long lasting marriage for 2012 and beyond. **S**