

"Crazy Heart" – A Review

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Jeff Bridges is one of those actors that I automatically want to love. His maverick air (in the true sense of the word as an unusual rule-breaker) gives such a distinctive flavor to everything he's in that is hard to not enjoy his performance.

"Crazy Heart" is no exception, but for his co-stars, this "distinctive flavor" might have been a little much. It is definitely a Jeff Bridges movie, with a few other people in it.

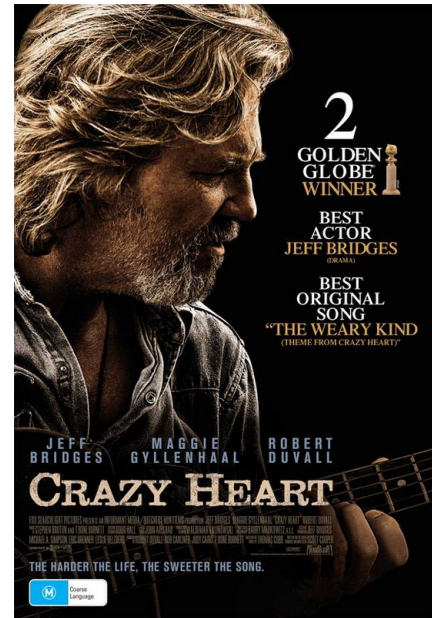
The story goes that Bad Blade (Jeff Bridges) is a country music singer whose career has never done him well. He has the prerequisite elements in his life: four failed marriages, estranged family, beat-up pickup truck, alcoholism, a long string of one-night stands... and success still eludes him. He knows it's not his music, though, because his protégé Tommy Sweet (Colin Farrell) is filling up whole arenas with the songs that Bad wrote.

Yes, they call him Bad. Or Mister Blake, but mostly Bad.

Then, one night in Santa Fe, he meets Jane (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and she inspires him to... well, make biscuits and be friendly, but that's about it, at first. We already know that he's an alcoholic (preliminary buzz and the synopsis already told us that), but it seems like Bad's only issue with his addiction is that it can be a little expensive and he's usually pretty broke.

It was suggested that "Crazy Heart" would deliver a hard-core, one-two punch to the gut with some kind of brilliant heart-wrenching battle for sobriety. Unfortunately, that just never happened. Whether it was through odd and uneven pacing, or through the unrefined and unconvincing performances of Gyllenhaal and Farrell, the message was carried nearly exclusively by Bridges, but he was so involved in telling the story that some of the message got understated. The chemistry that one expects to see in a meaningful romantic connection was completely absent between Bridges and Gyllenhaal, which was even more unfortunate since so much screen time was devoted to scenes wherein we see way too much 57-year-old flabby man boobs. Add to that the slipping accents of both younger actors and their seeming unmitigated fear of being in Jeff Bridges' presence, and the illusion of the relationships with Bad for each of them is shattered.

On the other hand, the relationships with Robert Duvall as Wayne, the bar owner in Houston, and James Keane as Bad's manager were the actual interactions that made the story of recovery realistic and believable.



For all that I found it slow and sometimes bordering on boring, there was a visceral element that was more real and meaningful than all the “You Kill Me’s” and “Clean and Sober’s” out there. When Hollywood takes on issues like sobriety and addiction, it is generally either trivialized or sensationalized. “Crazy Heart” took a hard look at a man whose entire life had already been ransacked by alcohol addiction, regardless of the “entertainer” aspect. Bad Blake could have been a cook or a janitor or a traveling salesman, and the only change in the story would have been the career of the protégé that surpassed him – but maybe that’s really the point. He could be anyone. *Anyone* can suffer that loss, *anyone* can face that failure, and *anyone* can make the choice to fix it.

Ultimately, “Crazy Heart” is an excellent *art* film, with its own quirks and idiosyncrasies of understatement and lingering visual clues. It’s hard to say if this is going to get a nod from the Academy as a whole because there is an overabundance of significant flaws, but I would be stunned if Bridges did not get a nomination for Best Actor. His performance was the best part of the movie, which I suppose is the idea, but it’s hard to tell if his performance is brilliant on its own or by comparison.

I want to love the whole thing more, but I just can’t.