HOLLYWOODGLEE, LLC
1226 N Salsipuedes Unit C 1(805)704-5994 |https://hollywoodglee.com Larry@HollywoodGlee.com



Todayâ??s AFI Movie Pick: MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA is an epic drama that follows a young woman who must navigate the social terrain as a geisha in pre-World War II Japan. The film was produced by AFI Life Achievement Award winner and AFI Board of Trustees member Steven Spielberg â?? with a score composed by AFI Life Achievement Award recipient John Williams. MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA won three of its six OscarÂ® nominations â?? Best Art Direction, Cinematography and Costume Design.

MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA marked costume designer Colleen Atwoodâ??s sixth Academy AwardÂ® nomination and her second win. She has a staggering total of 12 OscarÂ® nominations to date. Atwood worked with director Rob Marshall one time prior â?? on CHICAGO (2002) â?? which resulted in her first OscarÂ® win.

MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA is based on a 1997 novel of the same name by Arthur Golden. Its screen rights were optioned not long after publication for $1 million. After the publication of Arthur Goldenâ??s â??Memoirs of a Geishaâ?• in Japan, he was sued by one of the women he interviewed for the novel. By naming her in the bookâ??s acknowledgments, Golden violated the traditional geisha code of silence and anonymity. The informant, Mineko Iwasaki, later went on to tell her own story in an autobiography that contradicted Goldenâ??s account. While the three main female characters are Japanese in the movie, they were cast with Chinese actresses â?? Ziyi Zhang, Gong Li and Michelle Yeoh â?? prompting criticism from the Asian community. Due to hostilities between the two countries, China withheld the film from its initial release and Japanese audiences were lukewarm in their reception, leading to average box-office receipts in the country where the film was set.

Steven Spielberg originally planned to direct MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA as a follow-up to SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. However, when his involvement was postponed by other production commitments, Rob Marshall stepped in to direct while Spielberg still maintained a producer credit. MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA cinematographer Dion Beebe had his work cut out for him, depicting delicate lighting of Japanese seasons while filming in Southern California. To achieve the right effect, he hung a massive

layer of silk over an entire five-block â??town,â?• and created controls to change the amount of light let in. For this extraordinary feat, he won the Best Cinematography Oscar$^{Â®}$.



The movie doesnâ??t end at the credits: Family-friendly Discussion Questions

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-MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA tackles the controversial subject of geishas â?? â??comfort womenâ?• or prostitutes who were sold into human trafficking. Can you empathize with the characters, and do you feel their struggle is relatable to other types of life challenges? Does it make sense that MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA is also a romance, when the women do not possess ownership of their own sexuality?

-MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA follows the story of young Japanese women who are sold into sexual servitude to support their impoverished families. However, the filmmakers were predominantly white, male and American. Do you think this impacts the authenticity of the film? Why or why not?

-MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA received objections from critics for casting Chinese actresses (Ziyi Zhang, Gong Lu and Michelle Yeoh) in the roles of Japanese women. Do you believe it is important to represent characters onscreen with performers that share a similar ethnicity or cultural background as the roles they play? Why do you think the filmmakers chose women from China to play Japanese characters? Were you conscious of this issue in representation when you were watching the movie?

-MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA was hailed for its heightened design and visual appeal, but it was also scrutinized for its representation of Asian culture by Western artists that evokes stereotypes and colonialism. How did you interpret the visual experience of watching MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA? Did you find the imagery seductive and intoxicating, or did it appear cliched? Do you think the filmmakers created an authentic or fantastical image of Japanese society, and how does this impact your impression of the story?

-How would you rate MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA?

About AFI Movie Club

I hope the AFI Movie Club brings some inspiration and entertainment during this uncertain time. AFI has created a global, virtual gathering of those who love the movies where each dayâ??s film â?? announced by a special guest â?? is accompanied by fun facts, family-friendly discussion points and material from the AFI Archive to bring the viewing experience to life. As a non-profit, AFI Movie Club is a member-powered organization, dependent upon the support of its movie fans. To support AFI Movie Club please consider becoming a member or donating.

AFI Movie Club is a newly launched free program to raise the nationâ??s spirits by bringing artists and audiences together â?? even while we are apart. AFI shines a spotlight on an iconic movie each day, with special guests announcing the Movie of the Day. Audiences can â??gatherâ?• at

AFI.com/MovieClub to find out how to watch the featured movie of the day with the use of their preexisting streaming service credentials. The daily film selections will be supported by fun facts, family discussion points and exclusive material from the AFI Archive to enrich the viewing experience.

(Source: AFI News Release)

Category

1. television

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Author
hollywoodglee