

Christmas in the Clouds

review by George Sax



A scene from *Christmas in the Clouds*.

Somewhere in the second half of *Christmas in the Clouds*, Native American actor Wes Studi (*Dances With Wolves*, *Last of the Mohicans*) shows up wearing a tartan kilt and playing himself, calling numbers in a bingo parlor. I don't know why this happens, but by the time it does, the incongruity doesn't seem important. The movie, whose makers appear to fancy it a Native American romantic comedy, is so vaporously insubstantial that nothing in it, even this curiosity, is focus-worthy.

Christmas in the Clouds—which has almost nothing to do with Christmas—has something that might, not unreasonably, be deemed a plot, but that may also be suspected of being an afterthought. There's not much going on in the movie's listless scenes. The dialogue, the direction, the acting and the editing all have such a flattened, enervated feel that it's difficult to arouse one's interest enough to pick out the worst parts. The movie has the style of an indifferent TV movie of 25-30 years ago.

Its chief plot pretext is a romantic involvement based on, then hindered by, mutual mistaken identities. Ray (Tim Vahle) is the manager of a winter resort owned by an Indian tribe. (Which one isn't specified, though the movie was shot in Utah.) His father (Ray Vlahos) has been corresponding with a female pen pal (Mariana Tosca). When she impulsively travels across the country from New York to see what her correspondent is

like, she mistakes Ray for his father. Simultaneously (an adverb which conjures more energy than the movie ever musters), Ray is nervously awaiting the arrival of a guide book critic, and, well, you get the idea.

All this may seem to be suitable to farce, but writer-director-producer Kate Montgomery's effort has the effect of a drawn-out sit-com, without the sit or the com. The movie feels like it's been hastily assembled from a small assortment of oddments. The Native American element is so cursorily treated that it could be eliminated without significantly altering the movie. (Neither of the two leads suggests an Indian heritage.) And this unnamed tribe must be one of the very few in the American West that neither has nor wants to establish a casino. It's scarcely worth pondering, but it's somewhat less than obvious why no one at a mountain resort seems to own a pair of skis.

Actor Graham Green, who's a Mohawk, and M. Emmet Walsh, who isn't, are around to lend their names to this project, although, again, one wonders why.

But then, Robert Redford and his Sundance Institute are thanked in the credits for their support, and one might briefly ponder how their cooperation was obtained. Maybe Redford didn't read the script and thought the movie had something to do with Indians. **av**

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