

The Last Request (2006)



One of the most sacred things in the chronicles of history is the last dying wish. What a man requests on his death bed is not to be taken lightly. After all anything important enough to use your last breath on should be treated as extremely important. Naturally something this important would be made into a light comedy. Such is the inception of 'The Last Request'. This flick also throws in any sacred vow, a man in training to become a clergyman. Basically a dying man wants to make sure his family name will continue. He has two sons but since one of them is in the seminary it is up to the older brother to find a suitable young woman and procreate. When he dies it is up to the seminarian to step up to the plate. This may sound like a truly dreadful idea for a comedy but somehow the cast and crew managed to create a reasonably amusing little flick. It is certain that this film will not be likened to any classics in the genre but it is better than a lot of the sex romp teen flicks that have largely taken over the genre. This film is light entertainment that is fun to watch. With so many reruns on television this is a good fall back hour and a half of light hearted entertainment.

The film was written and directed by John DeBellis. This is his first feature length movie in both fields so some slack can be afforded here. Most of his writing experience has been in some minor television series 'D.C. Follies' and the more popular 'Parker Lewis Can't Lose'. He was also on the writing staff of Saturday Night Live for awhile. This is his freshman opus for direction. In writing the script for this flick the episodic nature of his previous experience comes through. The film is more a series of strange vignettes held together by the basic premise. The main character is driven by a moral conflict that is of a serious nature. He is torn between serving God as a priest or making sure his father sees a grandchild before he dies. This might have been better off if done as more of a dark comedy than the silly flick it is. The script is straight out of the comedy rule book with a tried and true formula. The main character, Jeff, aptly played by 'Grey's Anatomy's' T.R. Knight is a man of serious conviction. By nature of his calling he is extremely inexperienced around members of the

opposite sex. In some ways this is an extension of his TV role, at least for the first season of 'Grey's' run. Knight does make easy work of this role because this type of character is familiar to him.

As a director DeBellis doesn't take any chances and really doesn't have to. The film is paced well going from setup to the series of sexual misadventures in quick order. He avoids any fancy camera work and lighting effects relying on just filming the actors as they present the story. The film was reported budgeted for \$1.2 million which may sound like a lot but in reality it wouldn't cover the cost of morning coffee and bagels on a major motion picture set.

The flick begins with tongue firmly planted in the cheek. Jeff is treading water as a shape looms near to him. Thoughts of 'Open Water' come to mind. A pair of female legs wraps around him and drags him under. Of course it is only a dream. In the real world Jeff is approached by a beautiful young woman with glistening lips parted. He is training to be a priest and she is just there for communion. Okay, we get it; Jeff is having a little trouble with that whole celibacy vow thing. Like Jimmy Carter he has lusted in his heart. Later at the seminary Jeff gets a phone call. We get a little glimpse as to the level the humor here when the phone is in the shape of a crucifix with Jesus as the handset and the cord is rosary beads. His mother (Barbara Feldon) is still upset that he is turning his back on life by becoming a priest. She also tells him he is her second favorite son, faint praise considering she only has two sons. Mom has something very important to discuss with Jeff and his brother Tom (Nick Scotti) and wants him to call since she hates to wake Tom up. As they talk Grandma (Irma St. Paule) falls down the stairs; Mom barely notices it. This is one dysfunctional family; anyone would choose the priesthood over staying with it. When Jeff calls Tom he is in bed with not one, not even two but three beautiful young women. Obviously Tom has made up his mind against celibacy. Three women may be an underestimation since you do get to see at least two others walking around but three were actually in the bed with him. When Tom and Jeff arrive at the family home their mother is there with the family doctor (Bobby Alto). Mom greets Tom with a big hug and has an air kiss for Jeff when she finally notices him. The doctor has something important to tell the brothers. Since he is unable to get the words out he makes them play charades. I told you this was a silly script. Finally they get the message; their father (Danny Aiello) is dying; basically any semblance to reality for this film as already past on. They go to his bedroom where the final request is made; he wants to see a grandchild before he goes.

Tom takes the plunge and gets married. On their wedding night, obviously not their first together, the bride, Maria (Iris Almarino) is on top and at that special moment lets loose with an operatic note that shatters the mirror over the bed killing them both. Now the only one left to fulfill pop's last request is priest in training Jeff. Back at the seminary Jeff has a lot of thinking to do. This is very difficult considering one of the teaching priests Father Patton (Vincent Pastore)

lives up to his name and treats his class like an army squad of privates. After discussing the matter with his advisor Father Brice (another Sopranos alumnus Frank Vincent) Jeff embarks on his secular mission for pop. He gets a job at a home for retired actors run by Mr. Oliver (Mario Cantone) and sets off to find a mate. He is attracted to the daughter of one of the residents, Cathy (Sabrina Lloyd) but since this is a comedy we all know it will be awhile before he realizes it. First Jeff has to go from one bad experience to the next. Knight has the perfect 'deer in the headlights' look to pull off this part. He has an innocence that surrounds him that can pull the audience in even to a ludicrous flick like this. He also has a natural sense of comedy that helps out a lot. It is fun to see some of the Sopranos wise guys playing priests just in case you wondered where they went after getting whacked. Some may remember Sabrina Lloyd from her stint in the television series 'Sliders'. The show wasn't the same after she left and her performance here demonstrates why. She is able to play the nice girl so well her performance is captivating. The DVD is released by MTI which has one of the most eclectic catalogs around. You can always count on them for something interesting. This flick is a nice change of pace.

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