



Movie Review: Joyful Noise

Vi Rose Hill (Queen Latifah) is a mother of two children who takes on the position of choir director at Divinity Church. It was a position that she desperately wanted, and one that she had to fight vehemently to acquire, competing with G.G. Sparrow (Dolly Parton), who was equally desperate for the role.

That intense rivalry quickly gives way to a partnership, but teamwork becomes difficult when the two women cannot reconcile their differing visions for the choir. While Vi wishes for the Divinity Church choir to be more traditional, G.G. wishes to include more secular elements, bringing in her grandson Randy (Jeremy Jordan) to help achieve that goal.



But Randy's role is a significant one. He has garnered a reputation as a troublemaker, and has taken an interest in Vi's daughter Olivia (Keke Palmer), who is in the choir. It isn't long before Randy's influence on Olivia proves to be troublesome. He takes her to a dance club, a scene with which Olivia is unfamiliar, having come from a godly home. Olivia begins to develop an attitude of rebellion, and is disrespectful towards her mother, which takes a toll on Vi's relationship with her daughter.

Meanwhile, Vi is also contending with another equally difficult situation. Her husband has left his family, and Vi is left to care for her Olivia and her son Walter, who has Asperger's Syndrome, on her own. Making matters worse, Walter begins to question his faith because of his disease.

Things become even more complicated when the Church's pastor begins to lose faith that the choir could win the competition, and considers shutting it down. This prompts Randy to push harder for the choir to sing more modern songs that he believes will be better received by the judges, despite Pastor Dale's request that the choir sing traditional Christian music. That debate causes some infighting, which results in Vi's quitting, and ultimately, Pastor Dale retracts the Church's sponsorship of the choir.

Will the choir be able to realize its dream in the midst of all this drama? Despite the apparent predictability of the film and its outcome, I won't answer that.

But what I will say is that there are a number of positive elements in the film, despite its flaws. The focus on Jesus is a refreshing change from a number of other films. It is in fact that very focal point that drives Vi out of the choir. She understands the importance of keeping Jesus at the center of her life and at the center of the choir's agenda, and is even ostracized a bit for having such a traditional view among a number of progressive thinkers. Vi's character becomes sort of a soldier of faith, fighting for what is right even as she at times seems outnumbered.

The film also does a good job at analyzing complicated relationships such as those that Vi has with her children. Her daughter's rebellious stage and desire to shake the image of a "church girl," though



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unfortunate are nonetheless quite realistic and add a layer of realism to the film, even when at times it seems as if the abundance of problems plaguing Vi's life seems a bit over the top. I mean, come on, is she Vi or is she Job? However, the issues involving Olivia also underscore the true power of God when Olivia ultimately comes to terms with what is right.

The film has a number of entertaining and touching performances, such as Queen Latifah's performance of *Jesus Fix Me*. The performances are uplifting and enjoyable. The film does not shy away from spirituality. Even the title of the film is influenced by the Christian faith, as it comes from the Book of Psalms — Psalm 100, which instructs, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

One area in which *Joyful Noise* suffered a bit in its inclusion of a few too many plot lines, which made it hard to stay focused at times, and proved difficult for the filmmakers to develop significantly any single story.

Additionally, the film makes some unfortunate choices involving sexual behaviors that seemingly have no place whatsoever in this film. For example, two choir members in the church sleep together outside of wedlock. The next morning, the man is found dead in the woman's bed, and it becomes a running joke in the film. The female complains that no man will want to sleep with her again, and she even inquires whether God intentionally killed her lover because they slept together outside of marriage. In fact, it is for this reason that a number of moviegoers may be discouraged from attending the film.

At times, in the film, some of the characters act as though faith and the Church are stifling, and Vi's strictness and strong faith are sometimes portrayed as hardheadedness.

In the end, faithfulness and a love of Christ shines through the film, but it was unfortunately undermined a bit by some of the more negative elements in the film. While the film is entertaining, it is not ideal for young moviegoers, or some conservative moviegoers.



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