



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

BE KIND REWIND

2008 USA 101 MINUTES

Directed by Michel Gondry

Starring Jack Black, Mos Def, Danny Glover

Preceded by a short.

Michel Gondry has established a reputation as the quirky king of high-concept cinema delivered in a lo-fi package. *Be Kind Rewind*, is no exception, restaging hilariously low-tech versions of countless mainstream movies in an unabashed parade of postmodern reflexivity. For in this sentimentally comedy of old-fashioned community values, idealism reigns and it is the little guys who - at least for a while - triumph over the oppression of larger realities.

In a neglected neighbourhood of Passaic, New Jersey, Mike (Mos Def) works at *Be Kind Rewind*, a run-down videostore said by its owner Mr Fletcher (Danny Glover) to have once been the birthplace of local jazz legend Fats Waller. While Mr Fletcher is away for a week, Mike's accident-prone best friend Jerry (Jack Black) becomes magnetised during a hare-brained scheme to sabotage the nearby power plant, and inadvertently erases all the store's videocassettes.

Terrified of disappointing his beloved boss or further jeopardising the already imperiled business, Mike convinces Jerry to help him shoot an improvised remake of the wiped *Ghostbusters* tape over a single afternoon, using an old camcorder, some 'special effects', and their own dubious talents as both cast and crew. Not only does regular customer Miss Falewicz (Mia Farrow) not seem to mind the absurdly amateurish reproduction, but her nephew Craig (Chandler Parker) and his homeboys are more than willing to pay extra for what become known as 'Sweded' versions of the shop's original video titles, like *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Robocop* and *The Lion King*. Local laundry worker Alma (Melonie Diaz) is recruited when Jerry grows sick of having to kiss his mechanic boss Wilson (Irv Gooch) in so many films, and soon the guerrilla filmmakers have become celebrities in

their own neighbourhood and cult figures even further afield. Business is booming like never before, and the boys' shoddy remakes are even more popular than the DVDs that Mr Fletcher has begun purchasing in a bid to save his establishment from imminent demolition.

Eventually news of these unauthorised 'bootlegs' reaches the big studios, and executive Ms Lawson (Sigourney Weaver) is sent in literally to crush the burgeoning cottage industry, along with the renewed neighbourhood spirit that has formed around it. With just one week to go before the shop will be reduced to rubble, Mike, Jerry and their friends will make one last film, built from the lost dreams and fractured history of their own ramshackle community.

Beginning as a comedy of parochial eccentricity and urban decay, and ending on a note of elegiac nostalgia for what might have been, *Be Kind Rewind* is a film where expectations are never quite fulfilled, be it Mike's almost relationship with Alma, or the group's quixotic attempts to save the shop. All of which is just another way of saying that Gondry may flirt with cliché, but he never gives himself wholly up to it, ensuring that there is always room in his film for wonder and surprise.

Be Kind Rewind pits shows cinema's potential as a galvanising medium in which viewers can actively participate, to transform themselves and reinvent the world. It may be full of madcap surrealism and clever-clever meta-cinematic touches, but it is also an unfashionably good-natured film with real heart. Oddball, endearing, and very, very funny, Gondry's film offsets its sweetness with just the right amount of sour, as its characters learn too late that it is never too late.

Eye for Film

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