

Chances Are ★★★

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

When I learned that the plot of *Chances Are* involves reincarnation, my reaction was: oh great, another contrived fantasy. Much to my delight, however, I was dead wrong. *Chances Are* is a spirited and good natured romantic comedy in the tradition of *Back to the Future* and *Peggy Sue Got Married*.

In the film, Alex—played by Robert Downey Jr.—makes a shocking discovery about himself when he meets Philip, played by Ryan O’Neal. Philip invites Alex to join him for dinner at the home of his friend Corinne and her daughter Miranda. Cybill Shepherd plays Corinne, a widow who lost her husband, Louie, 23 years ago and still hasn’t overcome his death. Corinne, blind to Philip’s love for her, lives completely in the past, posting pictures of Louie all over her house, office, and car. While dining with these new acquaintances, Alex experiences the startling revelation that he is Corinne’s late husband, Louie—or at least he was in his past life. In short, with his restored memory, Alex/Louie realizes that Corinne is his wife, Philip his best friend, and Miranda his daughter.

Given its outlandish premise, *Chances Are* is a surprisingly good film. Although the movie may sound inane, its execution is anything but gimmicky. Rather than exploiting Louie’s reincarna-

tion as an excuse to milk easy laughs, *Chances Are* explores the complications and conflicts that arise from this unusual situation. The movie’s premise is merely a vehicle for developing intriguing relationships between sympathetic characters. For instance, Miranda falls in love with Alex and literally throws herself at him, which puts him in an awkward spot since he sees her as his daughter. Although *Chances Are* is by no means stingy with its laughs, its primary emphasis is always on character. By the end of the movie, Corinne, Miranda, Philip, and Alex/Louie have all matured; they are wiser about themselves and each other than they were at the start of the film.

As much as I liked these characters and their conflicts, I can’t say that *Chances Are* is terribly profound. The movie is utterly predictable, and it fails to leave a lasting impression. And although the performances are good, they aren’t inspired. Only Mary Stuart Masterson as Miranda gives her character an extra spark. However, these are mostly minor quibbles in an otherwise charming and emotionally-satisfying comedy. In this day and age of movie violence, special effects, and car chases, it’s always refreshing to come across a film that is first and foremost about people.