

Crazy People ★★★½

Year of Release: 1990

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Review by Randy Parker

I went to the preview screening of *Crazy People* with very low expectations because the movie's star, Dudley Moore, usually makes fairly lackluster comedies. To make matters worse, the lead actress, Daryl Hannah, almost always rubs me the wrong way. But, what the hell, I thought. I'm a movie critic, it's free and it's my job. I'll go to the film and just grin and bear it. Much to my delight and shock, *Crazy People* turned out to be a whopping good time and the funniest comedy since *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

Crazy People begins with panoramic views of Manhattan that depict the city as one gigantic billboard. Right away, we know the movie is going to be about advertising. In fact, *Crazy People* is a wickedly satirical attack on advertising. Moore plays Emory, a burned out ad agency executive who is having a professional crisis of epic proportions. He is just sick and tired of lying to the public—all so he can sell products he doesn't believe in. But then, Emory is struck by a revolutionary idea: truth in advertising. Why not create ads which are honest? Oh, something like: "Volvo, Boxy But Good." Emory's business partner (Paul Reiser) thinks Emory has gone off the deep end so he commits him to the Bennington Sanitarium. After initial reluctance, Emory is surprised to find that he actually likes Bennington, and he comes to befriend the other patients. He falls in love with one of them, a sad but poetic free spirit played by Hannah.

The movie's gimmick is that Emory's truthful ads are printed by mistake, and they are enormously effective—successful beyond anyone's wildest expectations. Emory, in the meantime, has discovered that his fellow patients at Bennington have a natural knack for his truthful advertising campaign. He sets up shop in the sanitarium, transforming the mental institution into a functioning advertising agency. Emory and his crazy colleagues cook up slogans like "Come to New York: it's not as filthy as you think." and "Metamucil: it helps you go to the toilet. If you don't use it, you'll get cancer and die."

The ads are a big hit with the public and with the patients, who start to come out of their shells as they get involved in the creative process. They start to behave relatively normally, losing their compulsive tendencies. But problems arise when Emory's boss (played by John Heard look-alike

J.T. Walsh) unfairly takes credit for the surprisingly successful truth in advertising strategy. His partner in crime is Bennington's head administrator (Ben Hammer), who is hell-bent on keeping his patients in the hospital, even if they are psychologically and emotionally ready to leave.

Crazy People is easily Moore's most entertaining movie since *Arthur*. He is fortunate to be working with a perceptive script by Mitch Markowitz (*Good Morning, Vietnam*), fine direction by Tony Bill (*Five Corners, My Bodyguard*), and a tremendously talented cast.

For the second movie in a row, Hannah is frighteningly good. With her impressive performances in *Steel Magnolias* and now in *Crazy People*, Hannah has crushed my skepticism about her acting. She has proven her ability, beyond the shadow of a doubt, by playing wonderfully down-to-earth, anything-but-glamorous characters. In *Magnolias*, she stole the show as a timid nerd with funny glasses who metamorphosed first into the town floozy and then into a kooky, born-again religious fanatic. In *Crazy People*, she plays Kathy, a young woman who fears everything but who discovers an inner reservoir of strength she didn't know she had. Hannah beautifully conveys Kathy's overwhelming fear and insecurity.

Mercedes Ruehl, who was so memorable as the Mafia wife in *Married to the Mob*, is appealing as a compassionate psychiatrist, but the real stars are the Bennington loonies, played with bravado and charm by Dick Cusack (father of Joan and John), Alan North (whose character is obsessed with the ballet), Doug Yasuda, Bill Smitrovich, Paul Bates, Floyd Vivino, Danton Stone as Saabs, a guy who talks about nothing but Saab automobiles, and David Paymer, unforgettable as a patient whose vocabulary consists of but one word: "Hello."

You don't have to be a brain surgeon to find faults in *Crazy People*. Sure, it's formulaic and unrealistic. Yes, to a certain extent, the movie makes fun of crazy people. Granted, it's sometimes pretty syrupy: you know you're supposed to be moved every time you hear a piano. But it's easy to forgive these shortcomings because *Crazy People* is also incredibly hilarious and extraordinarily entertaining. *Crazy People* is that rare Hollywood comedy which is funny enough to make you bust a gut and gentle enough to warm your heart. As the guy sitting in front of me exclaimed, "This movie is a

trip!"

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