

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING FOR JUNE 11-17, 2011

The Journal TVview



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Fran Drescher stars in "Happily Divorced," premiering Wednesday on TV Land.

See Page 4 for more details.

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Double Take: *X-Men: First Class*

Matt: Passes with Honors.
Josh: One small evolutionary step, one giant leap for superhero movies

Matt: Go. See it. Now. The rest of this summer's releases are going to have a tough time outdoing *X-Men: First Class*, which hits near perfectly the sweet spot of fun, style, character development, and action. And this coming from someone who doesn't much like the series.

Yes, director Matthew Vaughn (Stardust, Kick-Ass, Layer Cake) has treated the material like it belongs in a real movie, rather than just an excuse for hastily-scripted explosions. Unlike the overstuffed *X3*, *First Class* actually knows what to do with its mutants – and how to effectively integrate their powers into the storyline. It's a movie that puts its characters first, and allows their actions to drive the "action" in the "action movie." Action and dialogue intermingle in scenes that actually advance the plot, often while taking just the right amount of time to build atmosphere and revel in the 1960s setting's retro-cool.



Josh
Moniz

&
Matt
Voigts

Gone is the self-serious tone that made Bryan Singer's first two entries so sluggish and in its place is not just sheer fun but also a refreshing ambiguity to the sides in the mutant war. *First Class* sees Professor X as a brash, somewhat naïve idealist and Magneto as a violent, scarred pragmatist – depictions more complex than the good and evil of most superhero movies and the bluntness of the previous *X-Men* films.

Still, there are a few caveats. It is embarrassingly conspicuous for a series that trumpets the value of diversity that only Caucasian mutants choose to side with Xavier and live to tell about it. And if *First Class* is meant as the start of a new trilogy, it doesn't bode well that before the credits the boundaries for the series' central conflict have more or less been set, rather than "set up" to be explored later. I'm all



The X-Men are shocked to find there is some creativity left in Hollywood.

for more period pieces of mutant armies battling through the 70s and 80s, but it's possible the most significant plot developments will relate to Professor X's male pattern baldness.

Josh: *X-Men: First Class* is not so much a superhero film as a great film that happens to coincidentally involve superheroes. That's a good distinction to make; all the best superhero films have it. So far, the only one that has really mastered it is *The Dark Knight*. Unfortunately, *First Class* falls just short of *The Dark Knight* because of cheesy bits forced in (seemingly by the producers). However, it's still a great, fun flick that will hopefully show producers that they will benefit from investing in

story.

As Matt mentioned, this film dominates your interest with ambiguous, adult ideas/story lines, but not in a manner that requires you to be a philosophy major to understand. Rather, it's the ideas that are fun to ponder on their own merits, but with the added benefit of having them played out in colorful scenarios.

The film's problem is how it tries to shoe-horn in melodramatic aspects of comic books for brand-recognition purposes. It's especially thick at the end when they try to tie the film to the previously made ones. I don't think it's needed, because I think this film is strong enough to branch off to its own interpretation of X-Men characters and its own franchise.

To explain the weird-

ness of name-checking, image this: McDonald's finances a good, smart film that is fun to watch. Now image, after all the great stuff the films had done, all the characters go to McDonald's for no reason and spend the last five minutes of film talking about how good it is. Really off-kilter and annoying because of how good the film was, right?

Matt: Prequels run a risk of being superfluous because we all know where the story goes. While not exactly needed per say, I have to give *First Class* props for not feeling unnecessary. Perhaps the general incoherence of 2009's *Wolverine* made the producers realize they would have to bring their A-game if the franchise was to continue. Unfortunately, early box office totals, for whatever reasons, have been lower than expected. It's kind of a shame, given how many much worse movies will no doubt out-gross it this year, but then, the same could be said of any number of movies, many of which don't involve superheroes.

Josh: I also have to mention, the film should get bonus points for style. It uses the 60s era closes and style without being kitsch. It actually adds to the film's visual look. The action scenes are tense

and fun, and shot in a sophisticated way that they can convey violence without going over PG-13.

Matt: Go. Enjoy yourself! There are plenty more superhero movies yet to come this summer, but I doubt any will be as good as *First Class*.

Josh: Go see this film. It's a film you'll actually be glad you saw.

Matt: 8/10, **Josh:** 8.5/10

Synopsis:

Meeting in their 20s, psychic Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr – a concentration camp survivor with the power to manipulate metal with his mind – work with the CIA to build a team of super-powered mutants. As the Cuban Missile Crisis heats up, tensions mount between the two over how much to trust regular humans.

Director: Matthew Vaughn

Writers: Ashley Miller, Zack Stentz, Jane Goldman, Matthew Vaughn

Starring: James McAvoy, Micahel Fassbender, Jennifer Lawrence, Kevin Bacon

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