

Tyler Perry's Madea's Family Reunion (2006)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V-3; L-2 ; S/N-5 . Running time: 1 hour 47 min.

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life for evermore. Psalm 133

Tyler Perry the moralist is very much on display in this story that he again directs, wrote, and plays three parts. Although his outrageous Madea is prominent with her imperious demeanor, the comic aspect of the film is almost overshadowed at times by the dramas of two sisters badly damaged by disastrous relations with men. Lisa (Rochelle Aytes) is about to become married to Carlos (Blair Underwood), a wealthy Atlanta entrepreneur, but he beats her whenever she displeases him. Vanessa (Lisa Arrindell Anderson) has drawn the attention of bus driver/artist Frankie (Boris Kodjoe), but she has been so badly hurt in two previous marriages that she is almost paranoid whenever Frankie tries to draw near her, despite his obvious love for her two young children and his own little boy.

Madea herself has gotten into Tyler Perry's Madea's Family Reunion trouble and been made by a judge to become the foster mother of the obstreperous teenaged Nikki (Keke Palmer). As you can imagine, if you saw Madea in Diary of a Mad Black Woman, her remedy for the girl is a mixture

of tough love and whacking the girl's backside, interspersed with lots of straight from the shoulder advice, which she also dishes out to Lisa and Vanessa when they seek refuge in her large old house. Of course, the flatulent Uncle Joe (Tyler) is on hand with his misogynist remarks, telling Nikki there's no room for her. Victoria (Lynn Whitfield), mother of Lisa and Vanessa flits in and out, her scheme to marry off Lisa not to be put off by a mere thing like abuse: her reply to Lisa when the latter tells her about being beaten up is that it is just something that black women have to learn to live with. She must stop doing whatever it is that causes Carlos to strike her. With a mom like that (and we haven't mentioned her terrible treatment of Vanessa!), no wonder why each of the daughters has serious issues that Madea will address.

The film is a delightful, and at times frustrating mixture of comedy and drama (verging on soap opera), with some ridiculous excess—the flatulent jokes could go, though junior highs would be disappointed, and the wedding scene is so over the top, as to unrealistic dénouement and in taste in nuptial decor that is so bad that it makes Graceland seem like the epitome of restraint. It's messages are also a jarring mix between Christian and the mores of Conan the Barbarian, as can be seen

by comparing how Lisa deals with Carlos and how the matriarchs of the family (wonderfully played by Cicely Tyson and Maya Angelou) address the gathered clan at the family reunion organized by Madea.

For Reflection/Discussion

1) What is it about Tyler Perry's Madea that is so attractive? What do you think of some of her rather harsh ways (as in dealing with Nikki and Carlos)?

2) Why do you think that so many abused women have such difficulty in breaking away from their abuser? What about Madea's telling her that only when she really wants to break away will she do so? How is this often the case with people trying to make such important changes in their behavior?

3) The neurotically suspicious Vanessa tells Frankie, "Let's be honest—all men want something." What do you think of his reply, "Some men come to restore"? What needs to be restored in Vanessa's life?

4) When did you last see two people telling each other at the beginning of a relationship that they are Christian, and thus would not engage in sex until marriage? Did you think that Frankie might be forgetting this when he and Vanessa are lying together on a bed? How did the later bed scene go against the usual "morning after" kissing scene? (How are the children as important in their relationship as is their feelings for each other?)

5) What does the film say about families and their importance? How does the episode in which Uncle Joe ogles the teenaged girl bending over a barrel to get him a cold drink play against what Aunt Myrtle (Tyson) and Aunt May (Angelou) say? What do you think of the following, which one of them says, "It's not what you're called, it's what you answer to," and "It's not where you're from, it's where you're going." 6) How is your own family similar and different from the one in the

film? Does yours hold family reunions, and if so, what are they like? Ordeals, or celebrations?

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