

## ***Henry Poole Is Here***

Directed by Mark Pellington, Starring Luke Wilson

It's rare to see an indie film come out these days that can talk about faith and miracles that isn't filled with mocking tones and sarcastic asides. On the other hand, it's hard to find Christian films that rise above the level of mediocre and still tell a compelling, believable story. However, both are possible, and *Henry Poole Is Here* proves it.

Mired in the midst of big-budget stoner flicks (*Pineapple Express*), animated space adventures that fall short of their predecessors, and the leftover comic book heroes on film, *Henry Poole* definitely stands out from the crowd. Its only real competition is most likely the obscenity-laced *Swing Vote*, which will turn off many Christian viewers, despite its eventual message of hope.

Mark Pellington jumps back to the big screen from a 6-year stint in music videos and TV episodes with *Henry Poole Is Here* and again utilizes his own Catholic roots to bring truism and faithful representations to the believers in the film.

Luke Wilson is perfect as the down and out Poole who expresses to his real estate agent that he doesn't care what the house looks like, because he 'won't be here long.' In fact, Wilson shines stronger in this role than many of his comic roles, bringing emotion and character to what could easily become a boring stereotype.

Radha Mitchell (*Mozart & the Whale*) is fantastic as Poole's next-door neighbor and potential love interest, lighting up the screen as well as Henry with her infectious smile and loving outlook on life, despite the trials she has experienced.

Morgan Lilly, in her first major role, is adorable as the unspeaking Millie Stupek, who helps bring Henry back to life. She literally steals every scene she is in and I can see her getting a lot of work as a result of this film.

Comedian George Lopez & Spanish soap actress Adriana Barraza are the two primary voices of faith in the film. Lopez pulls off a concerned priest very well and balances out the manic passion of Barraza's Esperanza, Henry's other next door neighbor, who is also the first to notice the mysterious image on Henry's poorly stuccoed wall. Both are handled authentically, with none of the tongue in cheek mocking so often seen in Catholic portrayals.

I would be remiss if I didn't also mention Rachel Seiferth, who plays the aptly named grocery store clerk, Patience. With her large Precious Moments-like eyes behind the thickest coke-bottle glasses I've ever seen, Patience strikes a balance between the absolutely unbelieving Henry and the madly spiritual Esperanza.

Albert Torres makes his debut as the writer on the film and manages to mix quite a bit of humor into the dramatic events of the film. I'm not sure if the structure of how we learn about Henry's past is a result of Torres' script or Pellington's vision, but it is reminiscent

of the style of *Cold Case*, a show Pellington has worked on a bit. There are some nice visual effects in the film, including a view of Henry as the wall would see him, which was very well-done. Also, Pellington got some angles and edits that I found unexpected, but refreshing on film. At times feeling like one of Pellington's music videos, there are portions where the past and present collide in quick cuts that could prove distracting to some viewers.

Christian music fans may also notice newcomer Brandon Heath's *I'm Not Who I Was* on the soundtrack, mixed with some unanticipated inspirational tunes from *The Bravery*, *Badly Drawn Boy* and *Ron Irizarry* (although Irizarry's prize winning title track didn't make it onto the film reel).

A few of the spiritual messages were a little more muted than I would have liked or that needed to be, especially towards the end of the film. For the sake of more conscientious viewers, there are a couple of minor profanities, expressed by Poole and quickly swept aside. However, as a whole, *Henry Poole Is Here* is an inspirational tale, with a positive, faith-stitched message that will appeal to the family market it seems oriented towards. I highly recommend it.