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September 28, 2005

De-Lovely Review

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## De-Lovely

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Hollywood has once again made a film about one of the most famous popular music composers of the twentieth century (and no, I'm not talking about John Lennon or Paul McCartney). *De-Lovely*, released in July of 2004 by MGM, is another story about the life of legendary composer Cole Porter, the writer of such timeless classics as "Ain't Misbehavin'," "Anything Goes," "In the Still of the Night," and "Night and Day" (my own personal favorite). But those expecting anything like *Night and Day*—the 1946 Cary Grant film that, with little

attention to fact and much attention to the music, first brought Porter's life to the silver screen—may find themselves surprised and possibly even offended with the more truthful account in *De-Lovely*...

The movie begins with an aged Porter (played with reserved style by Kevin Kline) being invited to a darkened theater by a mysterious 'angel of death'-like character (Jonathan Pryce, at times both mysterious and jubilant). This mysterious character proceeds to 'direct' Porter's life on the stage before them, beginning with Porter's first meeting with his future wife, Linda (Ashley Judd, in possibly her meatiest role ever). This plot device provides for an effective introduction to Porter's career, as well as a rousing finale near the movie's end. That said, though, I thought the repeated interruptions originating from the dark theater created for a few too many distractions early on.

Another divergence from the 'Technicolor days of yore' in *De-Lovely* is the film's more honest treatment of the unconventional relationship between Cole and Linda—in which the more dramatic elements of the story are rooted. Porter's homosexuality, though never graphically depicted (a tasteful point in the movie's favor, I thought), consistently provides an undercurrent of tension between Porter and his wife throughout the film. Though Linda is aware of Cole's *interests* even before they wed, repeatedly being dragged through the aftermath of her husband's many male affairs certainly wears on her, allowing Ashley Judd the opportunity to play a role where she's the devoted partner, the

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spurned companion, and the publicly embarrassed wife.

And yet, though *De-lovely* does address some of the more troubled aspects of Cole Porter's life, including the rather tragic elements of his relationship with Linda, the film also strives for—and achieves—a much higher goal: to celebrate the mastery of the music. From Porter's first Broadway musical, *Paris*, to his late and legendary success with *Kiss Me Kate*, *De-Lovely* illustrates the Cole Porter story in the way it should be illustrated—through his music. In scenes always true to the film's period nature, *De-Lovely* treats us with heartfelt renditions of Porter hits by contemporary artists like Natalie Cole, Elvis Costello, Sheryl Crow, and others. Alanis Morrissette in particular does a wonderful job in a recurring role as a female lead in Porter's stage musicals, singing and dancing her way into the hearts and minds of movie viewers.

All of which is to say that, while *De-Lovely* may not have been a perfect film, the sets, the numerous and well done period touches, the tragic love story, and (most of all) the music made for one of the most memorable films I've seen in recent memory.

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