‘One Crazy Thing’: IFFLA Review

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Courtesy of Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles

The Bottom Line

The Internet never forgets.

Venue

Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles

Cast

Ray Panthaki, Daisy Bevan, Dan Skinner

Director-writer

Amit Gupta

Marking two consecutive years presenting new features at IFFLA, writer-director Amit Gupta returns with One Crazy Thing, a London-set, low-budget romantic comedy. Graced with an appealing cast and a witty script, Gupta’s third feature could easily gain acceptance with art-house and multicultural audiences both in the U.S. and overseas.

Although the out-of-work actor is a familiar stock character, Gupta gives the stereotype a taint of tabloid scandal with Jay (Ray Panthaki), who’s stuck managing his family’s tandoori restaurant in a down-market corner of London following the monumental miscalculations that derailed his career. Although making a sex tape with his ex-girlfriend Claudia (Riann Steele) seemed like fun at the time, when she vengefully posts it online after he heartlessly dumps her, Jay’s life and career go into a tailspin, costing him a plum role on hot daytime soap.

While Claudia’s acting career takes off, Jay suffers both admiration and ridicule as an Internet-age punchline now known as the “Asian Persuasion.” As if the online and public humiliation weren’t embarrassing enough, especially when people recognize him in the street despite his attempt to hide behind a heavy beard and oversized, black-framed glasses, his parents barely speak to him after the shame he’s brought on the family. Jay’s best friend and fellow actor Charlie (Dan Skinner), as well as his agent (David Bamber), try to convince him to embrace his newly outsized persona, but he won’t even consider it.

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The only bright spot in his deteriorating social and professional life appears to be Hannah (Daisy Bevan), an American expat graduate student studying in London whom he meets by chance one day. Somehow this transplanted New Yorker manages to get by without much of an online presence at all and so has no clue about Jay’s viral-video history. Although he’s inclined to tell her about his sordid past as they begin dating, Hannah has fairly negative ideas about unemployed actors, the inanity of the Internet and celebrity
shenanigans, so he’s afraid she won’t see him again if he tries to come clean. But hiding such a substantial screwup even from a technophobe could prove to be a bigger challenge than putting his past to rest, unless Jay can find a way to somehow give the situation a bit of positive spin.

Gupta’s sophomore feature, Jadoo, concerned two warring family restaurants, but Indian food plays a much smaller role in the new film, which focuses instead on the comic extremes Jay must endure to both avoid his notorious online reputation and hide it from Hannah. Keeping things simple with an unfussy emphasis on the performances, Gupta crafts a lighthearted production that’s as suitable for broadcast as theatrical release.

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At the center of attention is Panthaki, looking like an Indian version of Woody Allen, as he takes self-deprecating humor to extremes in his willingness to endure a consistently amusing series of embarrassments and humiliations without losing a tattered core of dignity. Although Bevan brings less experience to her role, her relaxed demeanor and easy laugh imbue Hannah with a carefree spirit to lighten Jay’s often dour moods. The remainder of the small, charming cast and Gupta’s engaging scripting keep the film consistently relatable as this cautionary tale of betrayal and online revenge predictably plays out.

*Production companies: Scanner-Rhodes Productions, Urban Way Productions, Canary Wharf Films*

*Cast: Ray Panthaki, Daisy Bevan, Dan Skinner, Riann Steele, Raad Rawi, Shelley King*

*Director-writer: Amit Gupta*

*Producers: Dean Fisher, Ray Panthaki*

*Executive producers: Mark Goodwin, Dean Fisher, Ray Panthaki*

*Director of photography: Robin Whenary*

*Production designer: Niina Topp*

*Editor: James Taylor*

*Music: Graham Hadfield*

*No rating, 85 minutes*