

Up for a Slice: "American Reunion"

Written by Mike Schulz
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AMERICAN REUNION

You know that feeling you get when you receive a Facebook friend request from someone you went to high school with, and you don't quite recognize the name, and a smile slowly forms as you think, "Oh, *ye-e-eah ... that guy!*" That, in a nutshell, was my reaction to *American Reunion*, the third big-screen sequel to the beloved coming-of-age slapstick

American Pie

, and easily the most endearing of the lot. It took me a while to succumb to the movie's charms, but in the end I not only liked it; I would've happily "liked" it.

This response was, I'll admit, unexpected, considering I have only a mild fondness for 1999's *Pi*

and no fondness at all for its 2001 and 2003 follow-ups. (Until recently, I also had no knowledge that four direct-to-DVD sequels even

existed.

So

that's

how Eugene Levy has been paying the bills lately.) Yet while nothing really clever, or even really funny, happens in this latest outing, there turns out to be enormous pleasure in seeing practically the entire original cast – leads and peripheral characters alike – reassemble for our good-natured horn-dogs' numerically awkward 13-year high-school reunion. I can't, for instance,

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say that I've given a passing thought to Thomas Ian Nicholas or Chris "the Sherminator" Owen in recent years, and when I initially saw Mena Suvari on-screen here, my immediate thought was "Why is Anna Faris in this thing?" But for most of

American Reunion

's running length, the cast and directors Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg rekindle *Pie*

's fundamental sweetness with such success that you smile both at the repeated motifs you enjoyed the first time around, and at elements you don't even

remember

enjoying the first time around.

Seann William Scott, as that odious d-bag Steve Stifler, seems particularly rejuvenated in this effort, shading his manic, developmentally arrested party animal with the lightest hints of melancholy. All throughout the movie, though, you grin at the amusement and surprising warmth generated by familiar *Pie* touchstones: the relaxed, overlapping father-and-son banter between Levy and Jason Biggs; the lascivious directness of Jennifer Coolidge; the appearances of Chris Klein and Tara Reid and Shannon Elizabeth, all of whom look better than you perhaps expect them to. (Natasha Lyonne, who has endured more than her share of personal and public turmoil since 1999, also shows up for a cameo, and is so hysterically deadpan that you mourn the years we've been deprived of her.) At 110 minutes, the film is too long, and barring one early bit in which the ever-fearless Biggs unsuccessfully shields his privates with a glass lid, you might not remember much about the experience the day after seeing it. Yet

American Reunion

is still friendly and big-hearted and almost ceaselessly likable, a rendezvous with cinematic acquaintances who now, finally, feel like old friends.

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