



"Hurrah! The Ghostbusters have defeated the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man!"

RENT 12A

An old musical gets its old cast...

OPENS 7 APRIL

Director Chris Columbus
Starring Rosario Dawson, Adam Pascal, Anthony Rapp, Idina Menzel, Taye Diggs, Jesse Martin
Screenplay Stephen Chbosky
Distributor Sony
Running time 135 mins

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Set in late '80s New York, a year passes for a boho line-up of addicts, drag queens and dreamers as they sing about not paying the rent and falling in love. The gang includes HIV-positive dancer Mimi (Rosario Dawson), wannabe rock god Roger (Adam Pascal) and aspiring filmmaker Mark (Anthony Rapp)...

If you're going to bring a phenomenally successful stage musical about a New York City squatter community in the late '80s to the big screen, then surely Step One would be dialling up the agents of every thrusting up-and-comer flirting for a place on an It-list and finding out if they can sing. Step Two would be trawling MTV for the brashest, funkier directing talent making waves in the music-vid biz. Surely the last director on your wish-list to adapt Jonathan Larsen's adrenalised rock opera would be Chris *Harry Potter: The Boring Years* Columbus? (Though it's probably Trey Parker and Matt Stone, whose inspired *Rent* spoof in *Team America: World Police* – "Everybody's got AIDS!" – ruled them out of the gig.)

Point is, *Rent*'s braintrust hobbled its chances of striding out of the musical ghetto, à la *Chicago* or *Moulin Rouge!*,

by hiring not only the dependably dull *Home Alone* director, but most of the original Broadway cast to play the main parts. Yes, that's right – in 1996, they could sing, dance and convincingly portray impoverished-but-sexy young misfits. In 2006, they can sing, dance and convincingly portray ageing adults with pension plans, timeshares and aches and pains. You can practically smell the smoky staleness of a thousand nightly performances waft onto screen.

Which brings us to Dawson, who's new to *Rent*, still in her 20s, can sing and dance adequately enough and brings an authentic, three-dimensional vibe to heroin-hooked exotic dancer Mimi. Her set-pieces are *Rent*'s highlights, including the cheeky seduction number 'Light My Candle' and her howling rendition of 'Out Tonight'.

Indeed, the whole cast ably nail their dance moves and hit the high notes – but it's a turgid experience akin to watching a well-drilled army platoon marching past. A wasted opportunity, because while *Rent* may be a dated time capsule, set in the days when New York was still funky and being HIV+ was still a death sentence, there was much in its tragic story and vigorous showstoppers to recruit a few new *Rent*-heads.

Matt Mueller

VERDICT

It took Zellweger and Zeta-Jones to bust *Chicago* into the mainstream; Columbus' faithful but mediocre adap will only preach to the converted.

