



The evening took a turn for the worse after Steve suggested they watched his *Sergeant Bilko* remake.

SHOPGIRL 15

Martin and Danes get lost in translation...

OPENS 20 JANUARY

Director Anand Tucker
Starring Claire Danes, Steve Martin, Jason Schwartzman, Frances Conroy, Bridgette Wilson-Sampras
Screenplay Steve Martin
Distributor 20th Century Fox
Running time 104 mins

WHAT'S THE STORY?

LA life's not all it's cracked up to be for Mirabelle (Claire Danes), a lonely salesgirl and wannabe artist yearning for something — *anything* — to spice up her life. Before you know it, she's got not one but two men wooing her: oldie millionaire Ray (Steve Martin) and dopey "font designer" Jeremy (Jason Schwartzman).

Sigh. Poor Mirabelle. There she stands day after day, manning the posh glove counter at Saks Fifth Avenue — about as popular a destination for the store's upscale shoppers as the janitor's closet — and moaning about the glamorous, stimulating life she *should* be leading, if only someone would discover her for the unique, budding flower she really, truly is... If you're feeling queasy right about now, you definitely shouldn't stop at this counter. Keep moving. *King Kong's* down the escalator, in the action-adventure department.

Still here? Vaguely interested in the romantic tribulations of a disenchanting twentysomething? Or just a Steve Martin fan? Well, *Shopgirl* is not without its soft, felty charms. Adapted by Martin from his own novel, it's even got some perceptive and amusing things to say about love and relationships.

Martin-lovers expecting the white-maned funnyman, however, are in for a disappointment. This is not the happy-slappy camera-hogger of his recent *Cheaper By The Dozen* revival; this is the covetous Martin who's seen Bill Murray rack up choice parts and accolades in recent years and decided he wants some too. Yet he plays commitment-phobe Ray with too much sweet-natured benevolence — generous though he may be, Ray essentially pays Mirabelle to be his consort.

Fortunately, Danes keeps the crasser elements at bay and relishes her love-letter role, along with all the poignant close-ups and vintage costume changes. And she pays it back with an intimate performance invested with emotional longing. But Schwartzman still threatens to steal the movie from her. While Jeremy's narcissistic dopiness doesn't quite feel "real", Schwartzman's comic virtuosity and unkempt, puppy-dog enthusiasm force you into helpless submission.

As a comedy, it strains for laughs. As a drama, it sputters. As a love story, it's weak at the knees. Put all the elements together, though, and there are enough wise, wistful and witty moments to make it worth visiting *Shopgirl's* counter.

Matt Mueller

VERDICT

Lost In Translation-lite? Close. *Shopgirl* won't leave much of an impression but a few of its funny/sad highlights hit the spot.

