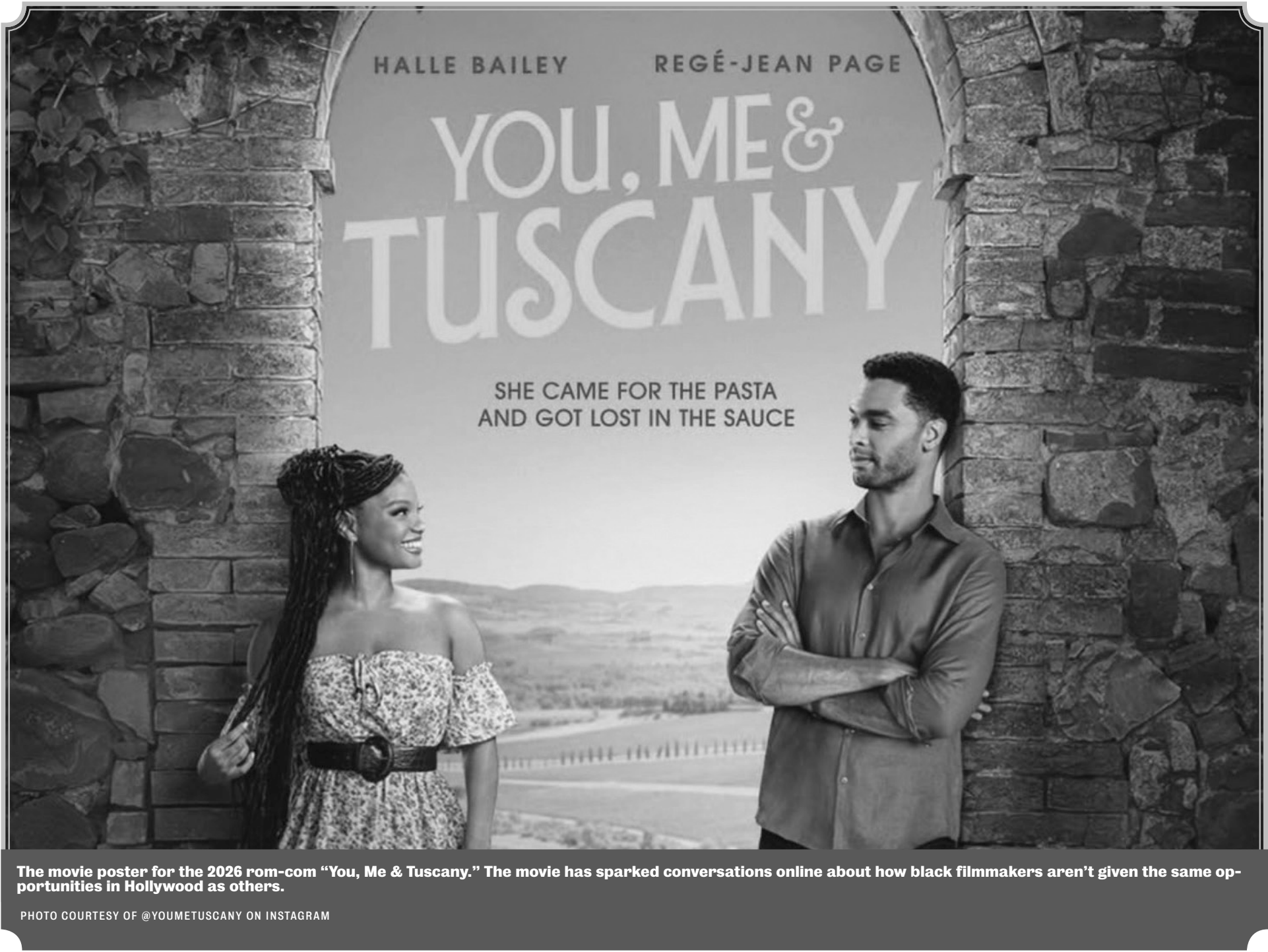


TAKE A ROMANTIC TRIP WITH ‘YOU, ME, & TUSCANY’



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What happens when you take “The Little Mermaid” herself and the Duke of Hastings from “Bridgerton” and throw them into a quirky romance with a beautiful Tuscan backdrop? The answer is a good, wholesome movie of the rom-com past.

Released on Saturday, April 10, directed by Kat Cairo and starring Halle Bailey and Rege-Jean Page, “You, Me and Tuscany” starts with a directionless protagonist Ana impulsively jetting off to Tuscany, Italy, to stay at a stranger’s villa without his permission. Upon being caught there by his family, she convinces them that she’s their son’s fiancée.

Bailey as Ana is excellent casting. She is able to sell the full-of-life qualities of Ana, which leads her to many of her crazy decisions, while also maintaining the grieving, directionless center of her character. Every big jump and every reckless decision feel authentic, and with a different actress, the landing might not have stuck as well. Bailey could easily become not only our princess Ariel but a rom-com princess of the 2020s.

Page is a great romantic lead, playing Michael, the cousin of Ana’s “fiancé” who runs the winery for the family. He is the more tightly wound of the two leads, being the family’s rock, who seems to have a deep need to prove his place in a family that already adores him. This conflict inside him is portrayed quietly and subtly as he falls in love with Ana, giving his character a groundedness that balances out the larger-than-life movie.

The two orphaned leads’ emotional arcs were surprisingly well done for a light rom-com, bringing up interesting questions and conversations about addressing grief. The two have great chemistry, supplying the audience with lingering looks and sweet moments filled with cheesy banter.

The fun cast of side characters energizes the movie with hijinks and jokes. The fiancé’s family, the Costas, are loving, with big energy and even bigger personalities. Every family member got a laugh out of the audience, with Francesca (Stella Pecollo) getting the most laughs in my theater. The cab driver, Lorenzo (Marco Calvani), and his car, Cucci, were lovable, and the audience grinned every time he returned to help our heroine, Ana.

The soundtrack is everything you want from a rom-com of today, with songs from Olivia Dean, Thee Sacred Souls, Ari Lennox, and prominently featuring Mario’s hit “Let Me Love You” The movie was filmed largely in the Tuscany region, and its beautiful cinematography definitely shines throughout the film.

I suggest not to watch it on an empty stomach; the movie is largely about food and the love of food. Many shots are dedicated to showcasing amazing meals, and Ana, as a young cook, returning to the kitchen and back to her dreams.

The only criticism I have is that some of the plot pacing toward the end, after the third act’s climax, was a little rushed but forgivable.

The movie themes center on family, romance, reconciliation and rediscovering your path. Its lesson is to take life by the seat of your pants and actually live, not just pretend to.

“You, Me, & Tuscany” is a joyful watch and worth a movie ticket if you still have the chance to see it. Take a trip to Tuscany with a theater near you!

This is where the review would end in a perfect world, but leading up to the movie, a tweet led to a lot of conversation about representation in film. On March 25, award-winning director Nina Lee posted on X that studios are holding off on acquiring and greenlighting projects, including her already shot rom-com “THAT’S HER” starring Coco Jones and Kountry Wayne, until the box office performance of “You, Me, and

Tuscany” was known.

She urged her followers, writing, “PLEASE GO SEE THIS FILM.” She followed it up with more posts, writing, “1. Met with a studio about my already shot romcom and they won’t buy it until They see how You, Me & Tuscany does;” “2. Met with an exec about a romance script I have, they won’t buy it until They see how You, Me & Tuscany does;” “3. Go see this film!” and lastly wrote, “A film that has nothing to do with me could quite literally change my life. Plus, I’ve heard it’s really great so I’m looking forward to supporting.”

These tweets ignited an internet conversation about how Black filmmakers and their art aren’t given the same opportunities in Hollywood or filmmaking.

On X, one user, @drivenby-

films wrote, “Hollywood so anti-black if ONE black romcom fails the careers of multiple black filmmakers will be hit... white romcoms can fail and they will still make new ones,” and another, @pixievic_, wrote, “This is the first black romcom in theaters in over a decade y’all. It’s sad but this is the reality for black art. Will Packer produced it, the leads are black, even if you’re not interested in this one buy a ticket & support so others can be made. It’s important af.”

Lee’s viral X post and the following conversation led to the publishing of several articles, and one from Variety reported the producer of “You, Me and Tuscany”, Will Packer’s reaction. According to Variety, he said, “It matters for the Nina Lee’s of the world and for audiences that want to see films like this get made.”

Packer also spoke to Variety about Hollywood.

“Hollywood watches, and then they react. Hollywood will react to the audiences more so than audiences realize; they have the power to dictate what’s made in Hollywood. You vote with your dollars,” Packer said.

Director Lee seems to have received a happier ending, posting again on April 23rd, “This random post from Pop Crave really changed the game for me and my film. Excited to share new developments in the next few months.”

We can only hope that black-led and black-directed films can continue to be given more opportunities and fairness in the future. I, for one, think the future of black films is bright, and I can’t wait to see what comes next.

Rating: 4/5

