

The Science of Sleep

French filmmaker Michel Gondry is at it again: the tricks of the mind and memory are on full, giddy display in his new feature *The Science of Sleep*, just as they were in his last movie, the ineffable *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. A writer/director with a wonderful imagination, Gondry this time out, however, produces mainly whimsy rather than the intriguing complexities of his earlier film.

Aspiring artist Stephane (Gael Garcia Bernal) arrives from Mexico (where he has lived until his father died) in Paris to stay in his absent mother's apartment and is only able to land a crummy job at a calendar company. He meets the girl across the hall, Stephanie (Charlotte Gainsbourg), and through fits and starts, something of a relationship develops. Much of that relationship's progress is filtered through Stephane's lively dream-life, which often features him as host of his own "Stephane TV," acting out what he wishes to achieve in real life. He ultimately has some success at his firm, but the relationship with Stephanie is not to be.

This movie is odd. The dream sequences, many of them very imaginative, pointedly avoid up-to-date special effects, especially digital manipulation. Gondry willfully uses old techniques—miniatures, hand-crafted objects, sketching on the film frame, stop-action animation—to create Stephane's fantasy life, which is alternately clever and coy—sometimes both at the same time! Then this French/Italian production is almost entirely in English, perhaps because Bernal could not handle French, but the result is that it gives a strange cast to a story that aims to be *tres francais*.

The Science of Sleep has some amusing moments, most of them due to the shenanigans of Stephane's office mate, Guy (Alain Chabat), a consistently randy and cynical commentator on life, but it needs more of them. Too much of its non-dreamy narrative is made up of on-again, off-again exchanges between the muddled Bernal and the pouty (but charming) Gainsbourg.

An artist worth checking out again, Michel Gondry this time is testing the line between childlike and simple-minded, and one can argue about which side he ends up on.

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