

Regina King adds dysfunctional twist with ‘This Christmas’

By **Dino-Ray Ramos**

STAFF WRITER

IN one of the first holiday movies of the season, “This Christmas” stars Regina King as Lisa Whitfield, the eldest of a group of siblings that come home to celebrate Yuletide cheer — and a twist of family dysfunction.

King’s role as Lisa is a far cry from many of her sassy, tough-as-nails characters from the past. As a woman with a domineering husband and the oldest sister with an overbearing load of responsibility on her shoulders, she isn’t exactly the poster child for female empowerment.

“A lot of (Lisa’s) resentment is played out through the relationships with her siblings,” says King. “I think that ending up married for 10 years and asking yourself if getting out is the best thing for your kids — a lot of women can relate to that. I felt that this was the opportunity to be the face for those women.

“Hopefully I can encourage them to feel that they don’t have to stay in something that is not nurturing to the whole woman.”

We spoke with the diverse actress about how it was to play such a character and the ins-and-outs of making a family-friendly Christmas movie.

Q: What made you want to do a Christmas movie?

A: I think that Christmas movies go in the family category. Looking at it from a business perspective, movies that I did like “Cinderella Story” and “Daddy Day Care” tend to have a long shelf life. If you want to continue to expand your audience and have a new generation of viewers, it’s smart to do family movies. When they asked me to be involved, Delroy Lindo and Loretta Devine were already attached I immediately said, “Of course!”

Q: How does “This Christmas” differ from other holiday movies?

A: Primarily, you have a black family as the subject, but everything in the movie is uni-



SISTERLY LOVE: Regina King (right) and Sharon Leal play two loving sisters (for the most part) in the family-friendly holiday movie, “This Christmas.”

versal. There are little cultural aspects that are sprinkled throughout the movie that you can’t change because we are black — we wouldn’t want to. It deals with a lot of things that the majority of people in their 20s, 30s and 40s can relate to.

Q: How do you relate to your character, Lisa?

A: I am the oldest of two siblings, but I have two half-sisters above me. I can relate to her in thinking that “my way is the right way” because I am the oldest. She’s the only one that is married with children. A lot of people like that tend to think that they are well-versed in life than others.

Q: Would you consider her a pushover?

A: I don’t think she is that much of a pushover, but she is a submissive woman. She is vulnerable because she is scared of doing something that doesn’t serve someone else. Her sister Kelly (Sharon Leal), who is very close to her age, were really close, but when their dad left, she thought that she would never be the woman that is stuck with kids and dependent on a man. (Lisa’s) view was that someone needed to help mom.

Q: How did the cast create a family bond before filming?

A: We kind of just all got thrown together, and lucky for us, we just really liked each other. That’s the difference be-

tween a lot of movies — if the chemistry is there it’s beautiful, when it isn’t, it falls a little short. We didn’t do any special field trips or anything like that, but in the last dance sequence, you totally get the feeling that these people had fun!

Q: Was there anything in the film that parallels your experiences with Christmas?

A: There’s something about me in all of those women. I think a lot of women will say the same thing. I’ve stayed in a relationship much longer than I needed to (like Lisa); I am very prominent in my child’s life (like Loretta Devine’s character). I can also say that I don’t call my grandmother as much as I should because I am balancing work and motherhood, like Kelly. I can also even relate to Lauren London’s character Mel. She’s a free spirit and she throws things against the wall and sees what sticks. She’s kind of like the smile of the family.

Q: What is your favorite thing about the holidays?

A: Probably the food, the drinks — we just laugh so much during the holidays. It’s at the end of the year. It’s always nostalgic. It always happens when you’re with family. You’re always calling back the past.

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