

Here we go again.....

Party Review

Steve's Annual Christmas Party (2007)

(unrated director's cut)

Producer: Steve Wohlford

Director: Steve Wohlford

Starring: Steve Wohlford, "Mom" and a cast of dozens

Rating: NC-17 (no children under 17 allowed)

Showings: Limited engagement – December 21st, 7:00 PM

Location: Blaisdell Uniplex (4643 Blaisdell Avenue S.)

★★★☆☆

Since word first leaked of a 17th installment of the storied "Steve's X-mas Party" franchise in early October, fans have anxiously awaited the premier. While Party2007 is as entertaining as any in the long-running series, with each installment it is becoming increasingly difficult for Wohlford to top his own past efforts. This has forced the director to largely sticks to what he knows best - resulting in what amounts to little more that a re-presentation of the same elements we have seen many times before.

The plot of the party will likely prove disjointed and hard to follow for those not paying careful attention. Wohlford again goes to great length to set up the premise, but things seem to deteriorate rapidly. At times, it almost seems as if Wohlford has totally lost control of the party and has fallen back on the clichéd technique of simply documenting his unwitting subjects – a classic example of *cinéma vérité* run amok.

Part of the problem lies in Wohlford's insistence to produce, direct, and play the lead - reprising his role as the good natured host with an almost maniacal obsession on entertaining his friends. Unfortunately, the rigors of his split duties (after so many years) have taken their toll and it is becoming increasingly difficult to accept him as the carefree, party-loving bachelor that he strives so hard to portray – in fact, at times during the party he appears close to snapping.

Ultimately, the party becomes little more than a vehicle for the co-stars that Wohlford has once again coerced into participating in his egotistic flight-of-fancy. The true stars are Beer, Shrimp, Cheese Fondue, and Friendship.

The overall cast is once again made up primarily of the friends and family of the director – a troubling display of nepotism that seems to permeate most of Wohlford's other efforts in the "party" genre. Despite this, the "Mom" character is once again excellent as the surrogate host that helps hold the entire party together. "Max the Dog" makes his tenth appearance and, given his obvious charms, Wohlford's stubborn refusal to give him more than a minor role is bewildering. Max is limited to just a few short scenes that consist almost entirely of being led upstairs and then outside for a short time. At least, that is, until the end of the party when Wohlford finally un-cages the beast's obvious talents and he steals the show. Given the dramatic changes in the character's temperament over the years, it is hard to believe this is the same dog first introduced to the party over a decade ago.



A special treat is the reappearance of the "Brad Johnson" character (convincingly portrayed by Brad Johnson). Last seen in the 2003 installment, Johnson (a long time party collaborator of Wohlford's) reprises his underrated performance as the mysterious out-of-town visitor.

The soundtrack, while entertaining, was a bit disappointing. Few songs seemed to be selected with specific purpose and often seem at odds with the tone of the party. While there are certainly many great songs to be heard during Party07, it is almost like the director set an extensive music collection on random play and simply walked away.

Traditional Christmas decorations set the overall scene, but Wohlford's quirky sense of humor is on display as well. For example, a roaring wood fire serves as a backdrop for much of the action upstairs, but is jarringly juxtaposed with a simple, digital reproduction in the basement. In fact, the basement scenes, while certainly entertaining, raise a number of important questions the party fails to answer - questions like "How long has this 'temporary' bar been here?" and "What the hell does Air Hockey have to do with Christmas anyhow?"

As we have come to expect from the parties in this epic series, the special effects are once again phenomenal (even if mostly derivative of previous parties). The cocktail sauce, shrimp toast, dumplings, and a vast array of other delicacies will undoubtedly leave the party-goer's mouths watering. It is obvious that a significant portion of the party's production budget must have been "eaten up" by the buffet scenes (though the lion's share of the budget must surely have been devoted to beer, wine and cleaning supplies).

In the end, although Party2007 may not contain much that we haven't seen before, it is a vastly enjoyable diversion from the chaos of the holiday season and will undoubtedly leave throngs of hard-core fans wondering: "Will there be an 18th party next year?"