

Film Review: 'Marriage Story' paints love and loss with levity



VENICE: A French photo-journalist once told me that her former husband would come to her place to mend things — a broken tap, an electrical short-circuit — and she quipped that if only he had been as attentive during his married life, they would have never got divorced. Noah Baumbach's latest film "Marriage Story," screened at the Venice Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival, explores the same issue — of a how, whilst a marriage can turn stale, love can remain.

When Charlie (Adam Driver) and Nicole (Scarlett Johansson) meet a marriage counsellor, he asks them to list each other's plus points. She is a great listener, an infectious dancer. He is a superb dresser and dotes on their son. But despite all this, Charlie and Nicole separate, and since the law bars her from handing over the divorce papers to him, she gets her mother and sister to do that. The moment is awkward, it is heartbreaking. Charlie is a Brooklyn theater director, she is his company's leading lady. Although Charlie and Nicole want things to be absolutely amicable, their lawyers will not let that happen.

Baumbach's work is tough (also inspired by his own divorce from actress Jennifer Jason Lee), but poignant and painful, underlining in red how money and the law can make a mess of things.

Cinematographer Robbie Ryan's lens does a wonderful job of capturing some of the finest moments, dipped in sweet nostalgia, as the husband and wife talk about each other. Baumbach does not let bitterness creep in. On the contrary, he livens up the script with fantastic humor, making sure that "Marriage Story" does not turn into a sob story. There is intimacy, there is dynamism to get us hooked to the screen, and we remain all eyes for 136 minutes, with the final scenes likely to leave audiences floored.
