

'Going in Style' feels flat, formulaic

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 97 min.

It has been a long time since I saw the original *Going in Style* (1979). So long, in fact, that my memories of it have admittedly faded. Yet, while watching the latest remake to come down the pipeline, I couldn't help but start to think of it again. The newest version is genial but feels very toothless, with little in the way of dramatic stakes or deeper themes. Direct comparisons aren't necessarily a fair way to judge a film, but when the mind starts wandering off like this at a screening, that isn't the best of signs.

The plot involves three steelworkers and their families, all struggling to make ends meet. One is losing his house, the other has medical issues, and the third is, well, just a bit grouchy. Events take a turn for the worse when they learn that the company has been bought out and that their pensions have been eliminated. After Joe (Michael Caine) witnesses a bank robbery, he convinces his best pals Willie (Morgan Freeman) and Albert (Alan Arkin) to attempt a heist. Together, they'll steal back the much needed money cruelly taken from them. They're all seniors, which means that holding up a bank will present both technical and physical challenges.

Of course, my issue with this movie isn't with the cast. They're all excellent performers who do earn a chuckle here and there with less-than-ideal material. Caine attempts to inject his character with some outrage at profiteering banks, Freeman imbues his role with sweetness, and Arkin steals the show with some amusing quips as the designated grumbler of the gang. There are a few chuckles from supporting performances involving the perpetually confused Milton (Christopher Lloyd), an exasperated grocery store manager (Keenan Wynn), and the amorous Annie (Ann-Margaret), who constantly flirts with an uninterested Albert.

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The real problem here is the general tone and formulaic storytelling. While the odd comment is funny, the humor is played in far too broad a manner. There are gags in which Joe has trouble rising out of a chair and others featuring Albert’s romantic interludes, all of which feel obvious in execution. A dry-run test robbery results in a chuckle or two. Still, it ends with an extended joke involving two characters attempting to make a getaway on a slow-moving scooter with a security guard in pursuit. It all comes across as very forced and phony.

However, the screenplay’s worst crime is with its antagonists. As written, a nasty bank manager is so overplayed that he isn’t believable for a second. Humor is intended to be derived from him wetting himself during a robbery. This character and an FBI agent (Matt Dillon) tasked with catching the thieves are so clueless and dimwitted that one never feels any danger or risk for the protagonists during their robbery.

If memory serves, the original film was about a frustrated trio raging out against a world that had marginalized them in their old age. They were ultimately rebelling, even if they knew it might come at the cost of their lives. The motives here are simple and straightforward. So much so that this redo feels like a *Grumpy Old Men* sequel. Maybe *Grumpy (But Sweet) Old Men Rob a Bank* would have been a better moniker. As a result, the movie is well-intentioned and genial in the moment, but doesn’t present events with a unique enough perspective to make it worthwhile. In the end, *Going in Style* has little bite or edge and just isn’t funny enough to recommend.

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